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.....
Since 1941, the lofty visages of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln have attracted visitors to South Dakota's Mount Rushmore.



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Host's Aspen SB breaks new ground as the industry's first triple-slide camper for shortbeds.

On the cover: Winnebago Destination 36RL and 2014 Ford F-350 in Southern California's Santa Monica Mountains. Photo by Scott Hirko



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Planning Upcoming Trips

The summer warmth is a blessing for those who struggled with severe weather last winter. Expect a brisk travel season



By the time you receive this issue, the summer travel season will be off and running. Many of your favorite destinations have dug out from the severe winter and are ready for the influx of RV visitors. And you won't be alone. Brisk sales of RVs are setting this season up to be one of the busiest in recent years.

As the RV community continues to grow, it's more important than ever to make plans well in advance for travel in peak seasons. Prime locations get gobbled up fast, as I learned not long ago in an attempt to make reservations for a campsite in Yosemite National Park. Within 10 seconds after the sites became available for online reservations, my wife, Lynne, standing diligently by the computer, disappointedly received a "site full" notice. And we were trying to get in during the end of March!

Thankfully, there are a number of private RV parks surrounding Yosemite where spaces are easier to secure and, quite frankly, are much more accommodating for larger RVs. Lightweight materials have made it possible to offer longer trailers with better livability that can be towed by half-ton pickups and SUVs, even compact SUVs. For that reason alone, campsite size is now a critical factor when making reservations.

A prime example of the trend to build longer RVs is the Destination, tested on page 44. This fifth-wheel spans more than 37 feet and needs adequate real estate to extend its three slideouts. Add in the truck and room to maneuver, and you get the picture — space concerns are valid. And here's a good reason to get out your tape measure: Trailers and fifth-wheels are always longer than the numbers the model designations suggest. Surprises are eliminated when you know the exact space requirements before making reservations and venturing out.

Not everyone thinks bigger is better. Take the Sonic, featured on page 60. It's a bit shorter than 23 feet and can be parked just about anywhere. This is not a bare-bones trailer; it offers comfortable sleeping and dining, and has an exceptionally large bathroom. Typically, owners of this type of rig will spend more time outdoors, and setting up the ultimate patio (page 75) will be a big part of the experience.

Regardless of your mode of RV travel, we'll show you how to stay better connected on the road (page 70), introduce a revolutionary way to air-up tires with little effort and great accuracy (page 86), and find the right batteries to keep appliances and accessories operating smoothly (page 93). It's going to be a great summer. 🚐

— Bob Livingston, publisher

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In 1966, Iowa travel trailer manufacturer John K. Hanson went to Detroit to study automotive assembly-line concepts. He applied these ideas to his new mass-produced Winnebago motorhomes, cutting the cost of traditional custom-made motorhomes approximately in half and introducing the concept of affordable motorhomes for the working family.

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Keeping It Clean

My husband, Darrell, and I read and enjoy every *Trailer Life* issue but found the May *Keep It Clean* article and photos by Emily and Mark Fagan especially informative. Good work!

Hopefully, others will read it and take to heart the sanitary and etiquette sections. We are always somewhat amused and horrified to see people dumping their RV tanks without gloves, wiping their hands on their pants and driving away without even using hand sanitizer.

When we arrive at a site, I spray a bleach-and-water solution on the campsite's freshwater hookup and the end of our RV's freshwater hose. Can't be too careful! I always work from the cleanest to the dirtiest tasks.

By the way, we would like to see more articles about smaller travel trailers for two or for small families. We love our Sunline Que, towed by a Honda Ridgeline, but we would like to get a little larger RV that would not require a bigger truck.

Patty Perry

Moon Township, Pennsylvania

In regard to the article on sanitation, it was not a good decision to show someone using a white drinking-water hose attached to the dump-station faucet to clean the dump station. *Trailer Life* should illustrate safer dump-station practices.

Fred Higgins, Sterling Heights, Michigan

Fred, thanks for your comment. Yes, many people use a gray hose when hooking to a flushing system, which offers a color distinction. Some of the gray hoses are not very flexible, and the white ones are easier to work with, so a separate white hose is often used to hook up to a flush or clean-out connector, or to dump gray water. In this case, the hose should be clearly marked for gray-water service so that it is not used to hook up to city water. — Editors

Emily Fagan's article on holding-tank

Madeline Island Ferry

I very much appreciated and enjoyed Bill Graves' piece on Wisconsin's Apostle Islands in the May issue. Since I retired three years ago, we have talked about taking our RV up there for a week or two. We need to research how large a fifth-wheel and truck can go on the ferry to Madeline Island. We have a 35-foot RV that we tow with our Ford F-250.

Bob Wilkie, El Dorado Hills, California

The folks at Madeline Island Ferry Line informed us that the summer ferry transports travel trailers and fifth-wheels of all lengths. For more information, call 715-747-2015 or visit www.madferry.com. — Editors



procedures was most interesting and informative. I have to take issue with one of her statements, however, and that is where she says, "Keep the gray-tank valve open so it can drain as needed." Have you ever wandered around an RV park and suddenly gotten a distinctive sewer smell? That's because someone has left a gray valve open, and someone else on the same sewer run dumps their RV's tanks.

There are P-traps in the inside sinks and drains, but don't forget that the gray tank is vented to the atmosphere through a roof vent. These gases then get to the air, and your neighbors will smell sewer even if you aren't the one who just dumped the tanks. The only way to leave the valve open is to have the sewer hose arranged with a trap in it so the standing water makes a seal for the sewer line.

Sverre Holgersen

Kelowna, British Columbia

Keep It Clean described using a clear elbow to observe that the tanks were emptying as desired. The product in the photograph was actually a back-flushing system, which wasn't mentioned in the article. I have been using a Flush King unit since our trailer was nearly new. The first time I used it, I was amazed at the amount of toilet paper that had not emptied out during the first dump.

I consider my Flush King as important as water for black-tank maintenance! I have my wife monitor the black-tank level by way of sensor lights and also visually to make sure I don't overfill the tank from below. I always hear it "burping" when it gets nearly full. I consider the Flush King superior because of the gate valve that prevents water from flowing out while the tank is being filled.

I find your magazine extremely informative and plan to be a subscriber as long as I'm a trailer owner.

Paul Wilcox, Troutdale, Oregon



Beartooth Highway

I read Lisa Densmore's article in the May issue on the Beartooth Highway with interest. May I offer a suggestion that the article would be more useful if you added a page with travel details, such as a good map of the area with all the place names identified, highway designations, road grades, tunnels and other info?

Bill Lampkin, Oroville, California



Looking Forward

Just a note to share info regarding the 2014 F-350 dually diesel featured in Chris Hemer's test of the Jayco Eagle in the May issue. I have the identical truck, recently purchased after a special-order build. I pull a 2013 Keystone Montana 3402RL that curbs out around 14,500-plus pounds when we pull. It has just 1,095 miles on it — not even close to being broken in yet on that diesel engine!

Recently, I did a short trip from our home in Indio, California, to San Diego, and my new truck averaged 11.8 MPG going there and 11.9 MPG coming home. It has 3.93 gearing on the driveline and 17-inch tires. The tow-haul mode on the truck does a fantastic job with maintaining set speeds going uphill or downhill. I look forward to seeing updates on the F-350 in future issues.

Richard Blackwell, Indio, California

Bike Backup Advice

In reference to "Toy Hauler Ramp Angles," Dennis English's letter in the May issue about loading a motorcycle into a trailer, here is an idea that I have used before. Before hooking up the trailer, raise the front as high as possible, as this will reduce the angle of the ramp. Another way to handle this slippery issue is to have the ramp covered with Line-X. It can even be

made in a color to blend in with the interior. Another way is to use the grip tape used on skateboards. Good luck!

Jackie Harris

Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina

One suggestion for English and his Honda Gold Wing is to engage the combined braking system (CBS) that has been used on various models since 1983. My last Gold Wing was an



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'05, and after some practice with the CBS I could easily engage both front and rear wheels to make descents. On my '05 model, I'd start the descent with full brake engagement and then ease off, allowing the system of valves to open at varied rates, which gave me a safer movement of the bike. Other manufacturers also offer some version of the combined braking system, including Victory, Harley and BMW.

The posting of ramp angles would help in calculating your way down when on two wheels. That's why I just go until I hit the dirt or end up in the front kitchen or bedroom when loading.
Carl Franklin, via email

It's difficult to include ramp angles because the truck and trailer would have to be dead level. There are too many factors, such as how the trailer

is loaded or if the RV is parked on any sloping ground, to determine exact ramp angle. — Editors

Mountain of Superstition

Regarding John Swaim's article on Arizona's Superstition Mountains in the February issue, nearby Apache Junction is a friendly blue-collar town. There are plenty of RV parks, two Walgreens, shopping centers, good places to eat, horseback riding trails and good fishing at Canyon Lake. And did I mention dinner shows? You get the picture. You all come by and see us and that wonderful mountain.

Ron and Gloria Bennett
 Apache Junction, Arizona

Digital Versus Print Versus Both

I recently joined the Good Sam Club and was introduced to *Trailer Life* through that membership. I am impressed with the quality and content of your magazine — enough so that I'm purchasing a subscription. I have, however, a slight quandary. I prefer digital, while my wife prefers hard copy. Well, we know who wins that discussion! Please consider offering a subscription to both versions. I know nothing is free and would expect a slightly higher subscription cost. While most of the content is the same, I understand that there are still production costs with either medium — but it would be the best of both worlds!

Jerry Barker, Clarksville, Tennessee

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More than 2,000 antique cars will be on display at one of the largest auto events in the Midwest, July 10 to 13 this year. Below: A Tucker 48, one of only 51 cars made before the company folded.

PHOTOS COURTESY IOLA OLD CAR SHOW

Iola Old Car Show

Once a year, more than 2,500 historic vehicles roll into this little village in Wisconsin

article by Pamela Selbert

During the second week in July, the town of Iola, Wisconsin, will once again transform into an antique car world. That's when the popular four-day Iola Old Car Show, now in its 42nd year, takes place. Upward of 2,500 historic vehicles — mostly cars and a few trucks, some going back a century and more — will roll into town. Every year the show draws more than 125,000 visitors to this hamlet of 1,300 residents. More than 4,400 vendors will be on hand with

just about anything auto-related, from vintage to new.

The cars will be displayed on a grassy 300-acre site in a variety of categories, says Joan Schultz, the show's executive director. These include, among others, all-original vehicles at least 38 years old, modified autos at least 30 years old, pre-1942 models and old cars with young drivers (cars must be 25 years old or more, drivers less than 25 years of age). The show's feature presentation, Four for All in '14, highlights four-door autos. This year's show also celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Ford Mustang with a car representing each model year. In addition, some 800 antique autos will be for sale, says Schultz.

The show features live music from the 1950s to the '70s. Fair foods will be available throughout the show, in addition to breakfast

served each day, a chicken meal Friday and Saturday, and a lobster and steak feast Saturday evening (a 1½-pound lobster tail and a 1-pound steak for \$25).

During the event, 1,600 campsites (no electricity; water available) can be rented on the grounds for \$70 to \$90. Shuttles to the show will be provided. RV campsites are also available at Iola Pines Campgrounds at 100 Fairway Drive. For information and reservations, call 715-445-3489 or visit www.iolapines.com.

The Iola Old Car Show takes place at 130 Jenson Drive in Iola, an hour west of Green Bay, July 10 through 13 this year. Grounds are open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is \$8 per day or \$15 for the entire show, and is free for ages 10 and under.

Iola Old Car Show, 715-445-4000
www.iolaoldcarshow.com



Triple-Slide Camper for Shortbeds

Host Industries' 2015 Aspen SB is the first triple-slide camper for shortbed trucks, according to the manufacturer. The camper has a side entry with a four-step extension. The main floor is 8 feet wide, and interior height is 6 feet 4 inches. Access to the 60- x 80-inch cabover queen bed is from both the galley area and through the bathroom with a full-size shower. A 22-inch flat-screen TV in the bedroom swivels for viewing from the dinette area. A CD player/AM/FM stereo is located at an easy-reach level for shorter folks. In the galley, a U-shaped dinette seats three to four adults, and an 8-cubic-foot refrigerator and pantry with generous space is in a slide, making for an open floorplan. The Aspen SB has a 65-gallon freshwater tank, and 51-gallon gray-water and 32-gallon black-water tanks. A 60-inch-deep, 31.94-cubic-foot lighted basement storage compartment is accessible under



the rear slide. Base weight of the Aspen is 2,995 pounds. The Bend, Oregon, company recently added two more dealers: one in Salt Lake City, Utah, and another in Monroe, Washington, north of Seattle. MSRP: \$50,000
www.hostcampers.com, 541-330-2328



Picture This

Send your best RV shots to *Trailer Life's* Wherever Adventure Takes You photo contest

Keep your digital camera handy this summer, and you could be the winner of *Trailer Life's* Wherever Adventure Takes You photo contest. Any time your travel itinerary leads you to a photogenic location — from a breathtaking waterfall to a spectacular sunset to a particularly grand campsite — point your camera toward your RV and the scenic backdrop and click. Then send us your best shots for a chance to win a \$5,000 RV-accessory shopping spree and other prizes.

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- Three Runners-Up: Powerhouse 2000Wi generator
- 10 Honorable Mentions: Coleman SunForce solar panel kit

Rules

- All photos require the inclusion of an RV. The RV does not need to be the primary focus but must be at least partially visible in the photo.
- All photos must be submitted in high-resolution digital format.
- All photos submitted will become the property of *Trailer Life*.
- Photo contest entrants must be 18 years of age or older.
- Photo submission deadline is midnight, Pacific Coast Time, July 31, 2014.
- Winners will be announced in the October 2014 issue of *Trailer Life*.



How to Enter

- To enter online, visit www.trailerlife.com/wherever-adventure-takes-you, complete the entry form and upload your photo.
- To enter by mail, provide your photo on a CD, DVD or flash drive (will not be returned) and mail it to *Trailer Life* Wherever Adventure Takes You photo contest, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Include your name, address, phone number, email address and a photo caption.



Get Your Vote In!

Trailer Life kicks off 2014 Readers' Choice Awards

You, the *Trailer Life* reader, are an expert when it comes to living the RV lifestyle. You have the experience, you've tested the products, and you know the best brands and manufacturers available. Now is the time to share that knowledge by participating in the 2014 *Trailer Life* Readers' Choice Awards. Popular categories such as Favorite Fifth-Wheel and Favorite Travel Trailer Hitch are back, plus we have a few new categories this year. Vote online in all 28 categories, and don't forget to pick your favorite RV state and campground. Vote once per day, every day, until **September 19, 2014**. Cast your vote for more than 100 brands. Among the winners from last year are recognizable names such as Keystone RV, Lance Camper, Jayco, Camping World, Banks Power, Pilot Flying J and Cracker Barrel. Now, we're counting on you to help choose this year's winners. Remember, you can vote once per day in every category.

www.trailerlife.com/readers-choice



Ohio Space Shuttle Exhibit

The National Museum of the U.S. Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, recently opened its Space Shuttle Exhibit. Visitors can experience the size and shape of a space shuttle when entering the payload bay of a full-scale representation of a NASA shuttle. Additionally, two interactive landing simulators allow visitors to test their skills at landing a space-shuttle orbiter, and space-related videos are available for viewing. Museum Director Jack Hudson says, "This exhibit will inspire us all to learn more about space and the role of our Air Force in space, and we hope that when you visit, it will inspire you, too."

National Museum of the U.S. Air Force
937-255-3286, www.nationalmuseum.af.mil

For camping information in Dayton, Ohio,
visit www.goodsamcamping.com
or www.ohiocamper.com

Amarillo's RV Museum

If you're visiting the Texas Panhandle, the area bordered by New Mexico and Oklahoma, be sure to visit the RV Museum in Amarillo. While exploring the Old West, you can take a look at the oldest Fleetwood in existence, along with 20 other vintage RVs. Among the models on display are a 1936 Alma trailer, a 1937 Kozy Kamp tent trailer, a 1948 Airstream and the 1948 Happy Max Flexible bus from the Robin Williams' movie *RV*. The RVs are exhibited with period accessories, including old-fashioned gas pumps and camping equipment. Owner Jack Sisemore periodically changes the RVs on display and adds to the collection. Vintage motorcycles and cars are also part of the exhibit.

The RV Museum is housed at the Jack Sisemore Traveland RV dealership at 4341 Canyon E-Way. Admission is free, and the museum is open weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. 800-538-7782, www.rvmuseum.net





Towing Through Time

A unique Chattanooga museum glorifies vintage tow trucks and the pioneers who built and used them

article and photos by Carol Thompson

Chattanooga, Tennessee, best known for the Choo-Choo and Moon Pie, is also home to the International Towing and Recovery Museum. This unique place rotates its impressive collection of vintage tow trucks, antique tools and gasoline

memorabilia.

As the story goes, Chattanooga garage worker Ernest Holmes got a distress call that a Model T Ford had flipped in a ditch. After hours of trying to manhandle the wrecked car, it was rescued, but a greater plan was conceived. Holmes began tinkering with a 1913 Cadillac, adding a crane, pulley and outrigger system. *Voilà!* The tow truck was born.

The idea of rescuing stranded vehicles and towing them to the nearest garage was ingenious. Credited with inventing the first tow truck, the Locomobile, in 1916, Holmes



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is now renowned as the Father of Towing and Recovery.

It's hard to pick a favorite from this impressive collection. The 1947 GMC Bubble Nose topped my list. It looks like it could jump out of the TV screen from a children's cartoon. Rescued and restored to mint condition, it now proudly rolls in parades and abides at the museum for all to enjoy.

Another favorite was the 1929 Packard Model 640. It was commonplace for late-model limos to be converted to wreckers, as this one was. The limo's character and grandeur radiate through this classy tow truck.

My dad, who accompanied me to the museum, couldn't be pinned down to a favorite, but he liked the 1926 Ford Model TT with a Manley crane and the yellow

1935 Ford with a wooden bed. Regardless of favorites, these vehicle-recovery towers are a hit with transportation fans like my dad and common folk like me.

The true purpose of the museum is displayed in both the Wall of Fame and the Wall of the Fallen monument. Reverent and humbling, both honor those who served or died in the towing and recovery industry.

The nonprofit museum can be found at 3315 Broad Street in downtown Chattanooga and has ample parking for RVs. Within 10 minutes of the museum are numerous RV campgrounds.

International Towing and Recovery Museum
423-267-3132, www.internationaltowingmuseum.org

NEWSWIRE

RALLY



The Rally Returns to Phoenix

After a year's hiatus, the Camping World/Good Sam Rally returns in 2015 with a March 19 through 22 event at Arizona's Phoenix International Raceway. The racetrack hosted the March 2012 Rally, which drew 3,370 RVs and thousands of RV enthusiasts, and was selected again not only because of the success of the first Phoenix event but because it's one of the few venues that can comfortably stage such a large RV gathering. The Rally celebrates the RV lifestyle with hundreds of RVs for sale, thousands of camping accessories, a full slate of informative RV seminars and world-class entertainment. "We are excited to announce the return of North America's largest RV Rally to the RV community," said Marcus Lemonis, chairman and CEO of Camping World and Good Sam Enterprises. To register for the Phoenix event and learn more about what's on the agenda, visit the Rally's website. www.therally.com

DRIVING FOR DOLLARS



RV Driver Shortage

According to an article in the *South Bend Tribune*, a daily newspaper distributed in Indiana and Michigan, an additional 2,000 drivers are needed to deliver up to 30,000 RVs sitting on lots in the above-mentioned states. While demand for RVs is high and manufacturers are building to keep pace, shipments to RV dealerships are anywhere from four to six weeks behind schedule. Want to see the country while delivering RVs? A number of companies are looking for reliable transport drivers, including the following. Check online for others. Drivers need to have a vehicle that's set up for appropriate towing weight with a fifth-wheel hitch.

Camping World, 855-783-7483
www.cwrvttransport.com

Classic Transport, 866-724-1606
www.classic-transport.com

Quality Drive-Away, 866-764-1601
www.qualitydriveaway.com

RV Transport, 260-593-2005
www.rvtransport.com

WEBSITE



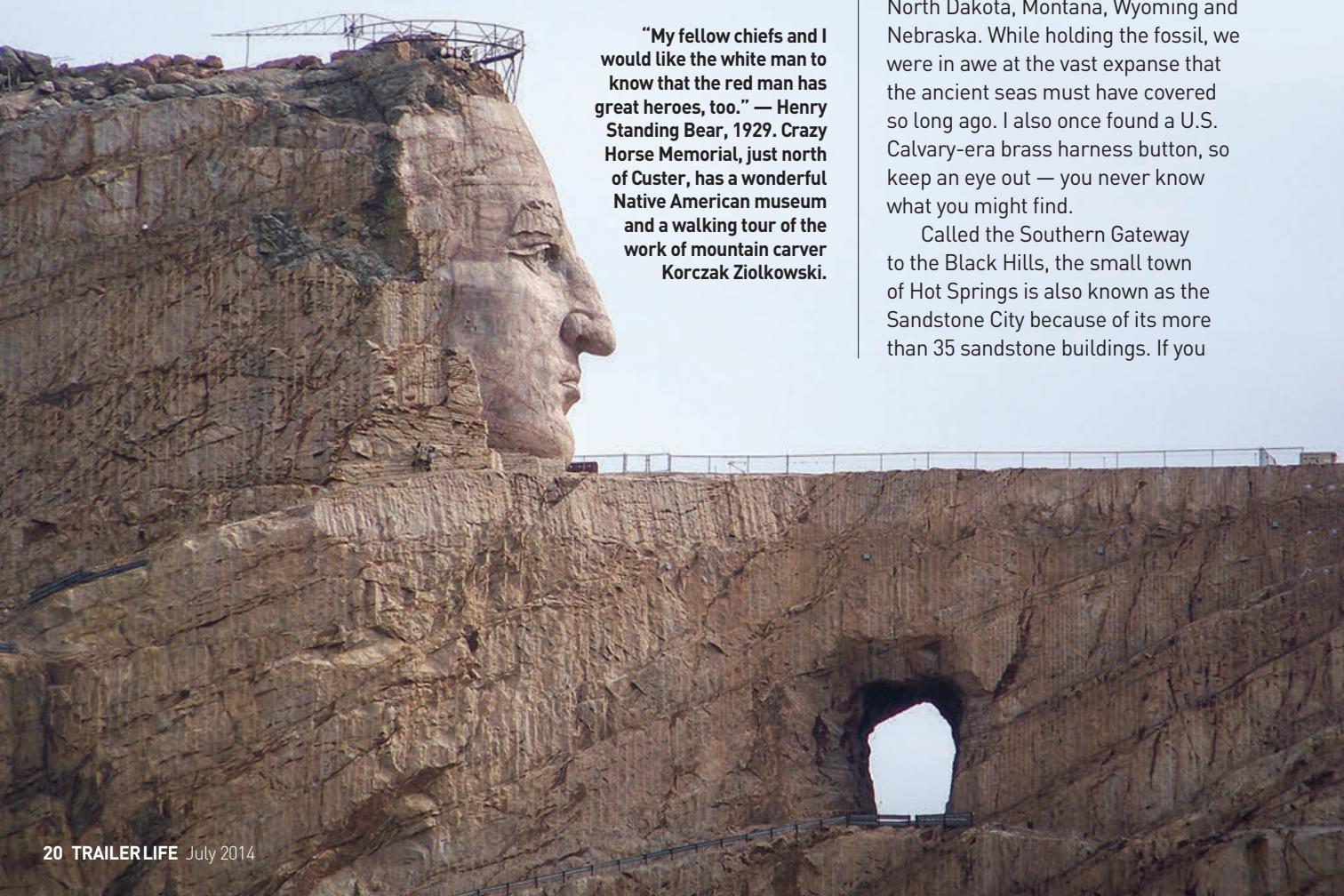
Camping in Europe

Are you heading to Europe and need some suggestions on where to camp? Camping in Europe's website is set up in nine languages, including English, and offers comprehensive information about campsites throughout Europe's main holiday destinations. Detailed search options allow campers to customize their requirements. The site is designed for users to click on various categories where you can choose a location by a creek, river or mountain, for instance, or pick a sunny or shady campsite. Additionally, you can see if a campground is open year-round, is centrally located, family-oriented, allows dogs and is motorcycle-friendly. Click on the Motorhome Pitches link to find campsites that offer electrical hookups, water, dumping, Internet connection and a whole host of other categories. Rented touring caravans, bungalows and hiking huts are also included on the site. www.camping-in-europe.info

BEYOND MOUNT RUSHMORE

Experience the American West in a land of timbered mountains and sandstone badlands, canyons and gulches, and miles of breathtaking scenery in the Black Hills of South Dakota

article and photos by **Scott Simianer**



“My fellow chiefs and I would like the white man to know that the red man has great heroes, too.” — Henry Standing Bear, 1929. Crazy Horse Memorial, just north of Custer, has a wonderful Native American museum and a walking tour of the work of mountain carver Korczak Ziolkowski.

An oasis on the Great Plains, the Black Hills region of South Dakota is a beautifully diverse land that ranges from cool, timbered mountains to desertlike sandstone badlands. My wife, Janice, and I are fortunate to live in the southwestern Black Hills. We are avid RVers and love to travel, yet sometimes our travels take us into our own backyard — and we do have a very interesting backyard!

The Black Hills is home to Harney Peak, the tallest point in North America east of the Rocky Mountains at 7,242 feet. A hiking trail leads to the summit where you can visit a fire-lookout tower built in 1938. From there, it's a wonderfully expansive view, but you will want to heed local warnings and take a warm jacket and plenty of water for the trek.

In one of our hiking adventures, Janice and I found a fossilized sea crustacean in a rock formation at more than 6,100 feet. From that vantage point, we could see the vast prairies that extend from South Dakota into North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming and Nebraska. While holding the fossil, we were in awe at the vast expanse that the ancient seas must have covered so long ago. I also once found a U.S. Calvary-era brass harness button, so keep an eye out — you never know what you might find.

Called the Southern Gateway to the Black Hills, the small town of Hot Springs is also known as the Sandstone City because of its more than 35 sandstone buildings. If you

are into Old West history, open spaces, beautiful vistas and abundant wildlife, this is the perfect place to base a summer vacation.

Hot Springs was founded in 1879 on the site of natural warm-water springs and was originally named Minnekahta, which means "warm water" in the language of the Lakota Sioux. Battle Mountain looms over the town, named for the battle between Sioux and Cheyenne tribes for possession of the spring waters. As legend has it, the warring tribes ultimately decided to share the healing waters for all of their sick.

Later, the city's name was changed to Hot Springs by white settlers in an effort to attract visitors. In that day, people arrived by train at the depot next to the Fall River, a spring-fed stream that meanders through town and alongside many parks and walking trails. In 1940 the original 1890 depot became a satellite location for the Chamber of Commerce and today houses the Visitor Information Center. Walking into the 124-year-old pink sandstone building is like stepping through a portal into the past. Outside, a sign depicts this station as the "World's Smallest Union Depot."

Next to the depot is an 1880s wooden jailhouse, which predates the City Hall jail that was built in 1893. The jailhouse is open daily in the summer. Old newspaper clippings tell the story



(Above from left) The Fall River County Courthouse is still housed in the original 1890 sandstone building in the town of Hot Springs. Built of stacked wooden 2x4s, this long-forgotten 1888 jail was discovered within a house that was being demolished in 1982.

of when Calamity Jane visited Hot Springs and raised a bit of ruckus across the street in the old Bodega Saloon. It was there that she was "invited" to spend the night in the local jail by the town marshal.

Because of its history and unique construction, the city of Hot Springs was named one of America's Distinctive Destinations by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Likewise, the Battle Mountain Sanitarium was given National Historic Landmark status in 2011 and named one of America's National Treasures in 2012. The South Dakota State Veterans Home, established in 1889, is also located in Hot Springs and contains beautiful historic sandstone structures.

In addition, the National Register

of Historic Places program named Hot Springs a National Historic District with a listing of 130 contributing buildings. The Fall River County Courthouse is still housed in its original 1891 sandstone structure. Hot Springs City Hall continues to do business in its 1893 sandstone building, and the Pioneer Museum houses its exhibits in a 1893 sandstone schoolhouse atop a hill overlooking the city.

Pamphlets for a self-guided walking tour of the historic district are available at no cost at either of the two Visitor Information Centers. I am employed with the City of Hot Springs, and my office is located in City Hall. Stop in and ask for me, and I will personally provide you with a pamphlet.

Evergreen Cemetery sits on a

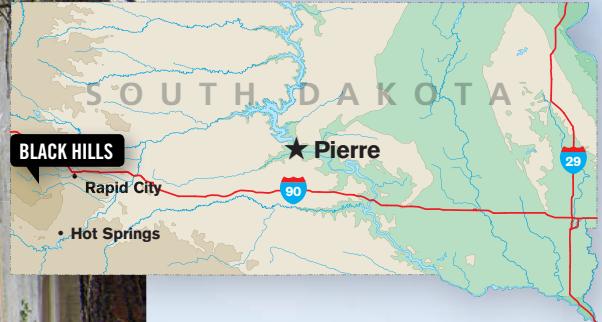


Wildlife in Custer State Park is so abundant that you don't need to look for animals — you need to watch out for them!

BEYOND MOUNT RUSHMORE



The Beaver Creek Bridge is located on South Dakota Highway 87 between Wind Cave National Park and Custer State Park. At 225 feet long and 115 feet high, it is significant because of its unique design.



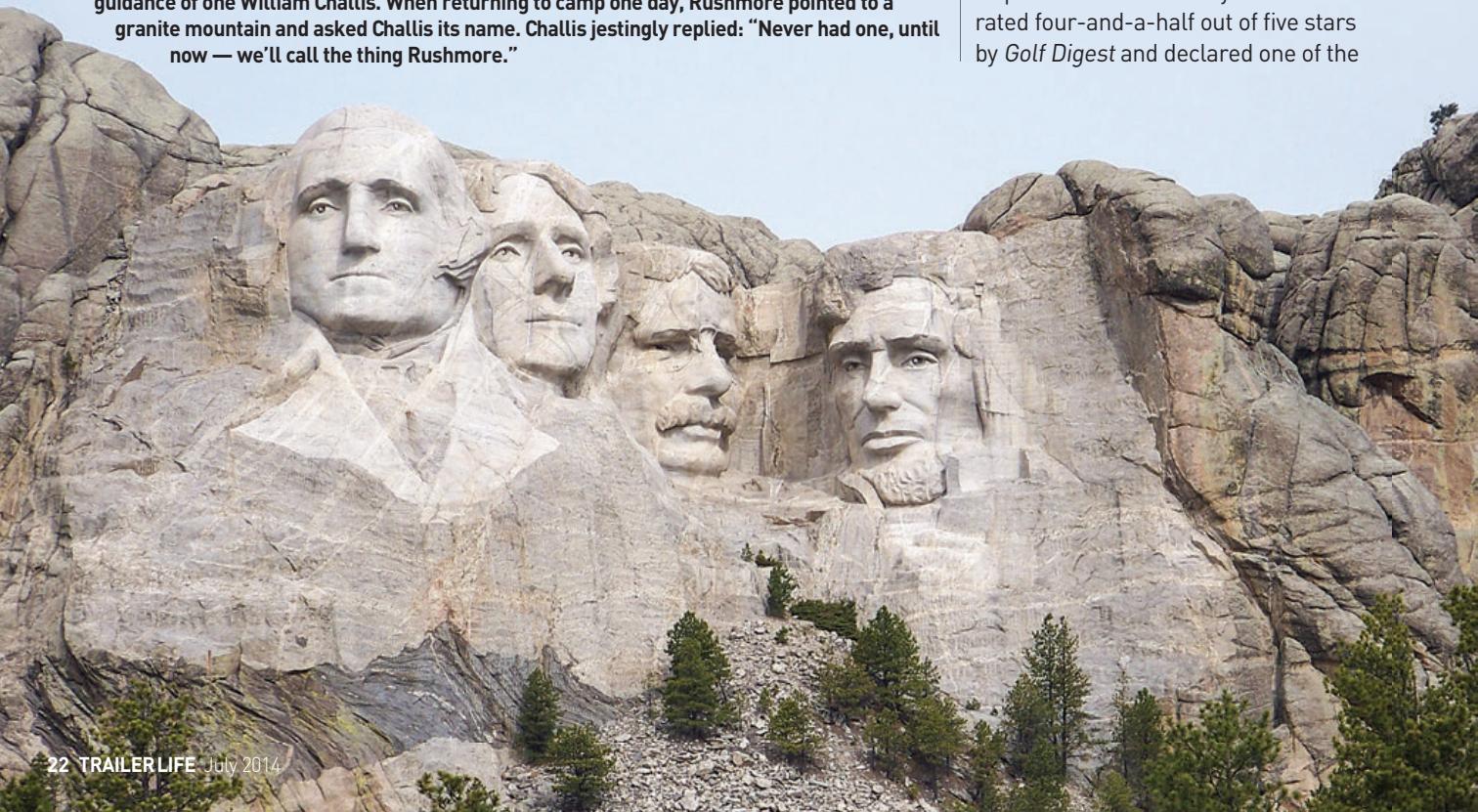
plateau above Chautauqua Park and Hot Brook Creek and is worth a visit for those interested in history and genealogy. We have found grave markers dating back to before the town was officially founded. Numerous Civil War markers include at least 16 Confederate soldiers. One of the markers is that of Confederate soldier A.J. Keller,

an attorney by trade, who was hired to represent the Grand Army of the Republic (an early veteran's advocacy organization) to petition the U.S. Congress to construct the aforementioned Battle Mountain Sanitarium, even though he himself, as a Confederate, would not be able to utilize the facility. The Mammoth Site and Museum

is quite a unique attraction. The walking tour explains that some 26,000 years ago, at an ancient watering hole, numerous mammoths and other creatures became trapped and entombed in the mud. This is a working paleontological dig with 58 Columbian mammoths, three woolly mammoths and a giant short-faced bear having been discovered so far, along with other ancient finds. This really is a must-see. Visitors are asked to inquire about overnight parking policies at the front desk or by calling 605-745-6017 (www.mammothsite.com).

West of the Mammoth Site and Museum is Southern Hills Golf Course, a spectacular 18-hole layout that was rated four-and-a-half out of five stars by *Golf Digest* and declared one of the

A little local trivia about Mount Rushmore: In 1885 Charles E. Rushmore, a New York attorney, was in the Black Hills checking titles to properties for an eastern mining company under the guidance of one William Challis. When returning to camp one day, Rushmore pointed to a granite mountain and asked Challis its name. Challis jestingly replied: "Never had one, until now — we'll call the thing Rushmore."





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BEYOND MOUNT RUSHMORE

Best Places to Play by *Golfweek*.

Being from the area, we occasionally take a dip at the city-owned Evans Plunge, a naturally flowing 87-degree, 5,000-gallon-per-minute bathhouse. It is the oldest tourist attraction in the Black Hills and the world's largest natural warm-water indoor swimming pool. Evans Plunge draws visitors for the same healing ability of the waters for which the town was originally founded. Visitors are asked to inquire about overnight parking policies at the front desk or by calling 605-745-5165 (www.evansplunge.com).

Hot Springs has two major grocery stores and three propane suppliers. If you have a hankering for fresh buffalo meat, you'll want to visit the Black Hills Meat Company on the north end of town. Also worth a visit is the Public Library, a beautiful log building overlooking the Seven Sisters mountain range.

The southern Black Hills region abounds with nature's magnificence. To the north of Hot Springs are Wind Cave



(Above) This young buffalo was admiring himself in his own reflection! (Right) In the 1920s a half-dozen British Columbia mountain goats escaped a petting zoo in Custer State Park. Offspring of the escaped herd can often be seen along the Needles Highway and around Mount Rushmore.

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National Park and Custer State Park, and Badlands National Park is situated to the northeast. To the south are the Black Hills Wild Horse Sanctuary, Cascade Falls State Recreation Area and Angostura Recreation Area. Pine Ridge and Rosebud Indian Reservations lie to the east, where you can visit Wounded Knee Battlefield, a national historic landmark, and the Wounded Knee Museum.

Anyone who visits the Black Hills must pay a visit to Mount Rushmore National Memorial, the world's greatest mountain carving, with its 60-foot-high faces of four exalted American presidents. Crazy Horse Memorial, a mountain-carving-in-progress that depicts Lakota leader Crazy Horse astride his horse, preserves the culture and tradition of Native Americans. The chief's face is almost 90 feet tall, and when completed, the horse's head will be 219 feet tall. These two monuments are about 45 miles from Hot Springs, a casual drive through the beautiful Black Hills.

For biking and hiking enthusiasts, the George S. Mickelson Trail, part of the Rails-to-Trails program, is a great day outing. The 109-mile trail, constructed on a vacated railroad bed, meanders through the Black Hills and crosses over more than 100 converted railroad bridges and through four rock tunnels. One of 15 access points, Minnekahta Trailhead is situated 12 miles east of Hot Springs. Ask locally about the petroglyphs that can be found on the trail going south toward the town of Edgemont.

We love to visit Wind Cave National Park, just 6 miles north of Hot Springs. The abundance of wildlife ranges from prairie dogs and coyotes to antelope, elk and buffalo. One time when we stopped to take pictures of a herd of buffalo, a young bull came charging up to our RV. We were concerned it would damage our toy hauler, but it was more interested in its own reflection and left only tongue marks and buffalo saliva on the trailer. Please do heed the warnings

posted throughout the park — buffalo are indeed fast and very dangerous.

We like to hike the nature trails and drive around the wildlife loop where animal and wildflower photo ops are forever present. Don't forget to visit the cave itself, and bring a jacket because even in the summer it can get chilly.

Adjacent to Wind Cave, Custer State Park is likewise home to an abundance of wildlife and has a wildlife loop where you will probably see the famous herd of wild donkeys. The park is known for the scenic Needles Highway and its many lakes, including Sylvan Lake, featured in the movie *National Treasure: Book of Secrets*. This is one of our favorite lakes in the Black Hills. Nonmotorized boats and other watercraft are allowed, and occasionally mountain goats can be seen on the hillsides.

There is much to see and experience in the Black Hills of South Dakota, the place we call home. We are certain that when you visit you will enjoy our backyard just as much as we do.

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RV CAMPING IN THE SOUTHERN BLACK HILLS

Although Hot Springs doesn't have any in-town campgrounds, free overnight parking at several locations gives RVers time to explore the city. The Chamber of Commerce's main Visitor Information Center at 801 South Sixth Street allows 24-hour parking and offers a free RV dump station (605-745-4140, www.hotsprings-sd.com). Other overnight parking locations include Butler Park West (by the library), Centennial Park (downtown) and historic Chautauqua Park (north of town; small campers only).

For safety's sake, the city asks that overnight visitors call the Hot Springs police department and give their name, license number and type of RV. Those arriving after hours can leave a message (605-745-5200).

For boondockers, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has several campgrounds and recreation areas near Hot Springs. Cold Brook Dam is 1 mile north of town, and Cottonwood Springs Dam, my favorite, is 5 miles west of town. Both dams were constructed to reduce flood damage in the Fall River Basin and offer an excellent variety of recreational activities including boating (electric motors only), fishing, swimming, wildlife viewing and camping (primitive, no hookups).

Angostura Reservoir and State Recreation Area is 12

miles south of Hot Springs and has five campgrounds, fresh water, restrooms and some electrical hookups. Swimming, boating, waterskiing and hiking are just some of the activities available. More information for these areas can be found at www.gfp.sd.gov and corpsslakes.usace.army.mil.

Three commercial campgrounds are close to Hot Springs. The KOA campground 5 miles east of town on Highway 79 has camping in the pines (605-745-6449, www.kampkoahotsprings.com). Kemo Sabe Campground just north of town on Highway 385 offers a view of Battle Mountain and a unique display of antique tractors (605-745-4397, www.kemosabaycampground.com). And Allen Ranch, owned by County Commissioner Joe Allen, is just south of town and provides a variety of Western entertainment that includes pack trips, tepee tents and musical entertainment (605-745-1890, www.gwtc.net/~allenranch).

Wind Cave National Park is home to Elk Mountain Campground. Hookups are not available, but the campground has restrooms and potable water. The fee is \$18 a night when water and toilet facilities are available. From late fall through early spring when the water is turned off, the fee is \$9 a night. Visitors holding a Senior or Access Pass pay half price (www.nps.gov/wica). 🗨️

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Happy Birthday St. Louis!



Historians don't agree on the date of the founding of Missouri's Gateway to the West, but that's not stopping this river city with a French past from celebrating all year long

article by Pamela Selbert

St. Louis, Missouri, Gateway to the West, celebrates a major anniversary this year. The city, with its unmistakable skyline, thanks to a silver-hued wicket that stands at the riverfront and towers over the mocha waters of the Mississippi, is having its semiquincentenary, a fancy word for 250th birthday.

As part of the yearlong festivities, 250 4-foot-tall "cakes" have been set around town in places of significance as a "Cakeway to the West." Although these birthday "cakes" look delicious, they're made of fiberglass and decorated by local artists.

The celebration officially kicked off last year on December 31 with a family-friendly evening of live music, theater and fireworks, and a special mass at

the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis (the city is a major center of Roman Catholicism). Throughout 2014 a host of events is scheduled, among them exhibits of old St. Louis documents, paintings and other items at various museums and galleries, musical programs, reenactments and a ball.

"St. Louis at 250" is the theme of America's Biggest Birthday Party at the 34th annual Fair St. Louis, July 3 through 5 (www.fairsaintlouis.org), which commemorates the country's Independence Day and the city's birthday in 1,371-acre Forest Park, site of the 1904 World's Fair. A local nonprofit group, STL250 (www.stl250.org), is organizing many of the semiquincentennial events, both at the fair and at other locations throughout the year.



Thomas Jefferson's vision of the spread of freedom and democracy "from sea to shining sea" inspired the Gateway Arch, St. Louis' iconic landmark and America's tallest man-made monument.



Five hundred acres larger than New York City's Central Park, Forest Park contains more than 1,300 acres of lakes, paths and public attractions, including the 1936 Jewel Box floral greenhouse.

St. Louis began as a fur-trading post on Valentine's Day, 1764 — although it may have been February 15; we'll never know for sure — when 14-year-old Auguste Chouteau of New Orleans and a group of 30 laborers, paddling north from French colonial Fort de Chartres on the Mississippi River, came ashore 60 miles upstream at a 30-foot-high limestone bluff. The laborers cleared away trees from atop the bluff and, under Chouteau's direction, constructed several buildings for the post. Chouteau wrote about the founding decades later, but since his 4's and 5's look so similar, no one can be sure of the exact date.

The site had been chosen several months earlier by Pierre Laclède, Chouteau's stepfather, for whom he clerked. Laclède, originally from France, had become a partner in a New Orleans firm that had a fur monopoly with the Osage Indians in

the Upper Louisiana Territory.

The post's location — on the west side of the river, as France had lost what's now Illinois to the British in the French and Indian War — was the first accessible high ground south of the confluence of two great rivers, the Mississippi and the Missouri. Laclède wanted his post as close as possible to the confluence but chose high ground because flooding is not unusual.

He named his new town for France's patron saint, Louis IX. The reigning king in 1764 was Louis XV (who Laclède later learned had secretly ceded Louisiana to Spain; it would be returned to France in 1800, then sold to the United States in 1803). St. Louis, Laclède predicted, would become "one of the finest cities in America."

Unfortunately, Laclède didn't live to see it. Just 14 years after founding the city, he died returning from a trip to New Orleans. At the time, 1778,

fewer than a thousand people lived in St. Louis.

In the fall of 1764, Laclède's common-law wife, Marie-Therese Chouteau of New Orleans, joined him in the new town. He had met her in New Orleans, where divorce was forbidden, after she'd been abandoned by her



To celebrate St. Louis' semiquincentennial birthday and have a little fun with its Gateway to the West moniker, 250 Cakeway to the West sculptures can be seen at noteworthy locations.

Happy Birthday, St. Louis!

husband, René Auguste Chouteau, Auguste's father. The "founding family," which included the couple's four children and Auguste, who Laclède raised as his own, lived in a fine stone house where the north leg of the Gateway Arch stands today.

With the advent of the steamboat — when dozens of the "gingerbread"-adorned boats began lining the levee, sometimes three-deep — St. Louis grew quickly. By the mid-19th century, the population soared to nearly 80,000. Some residents were free African-Americans, but nearly half were immigrants from Ireland or Germany.

Shortly before the Civil War, as Southern states began seceding, St. Louis' German population kept Missouri in the Union. When war broke out, Union soldiers and German militiamen shot it out with pro-Southern mobs on city streets.

St. Louis history is laced with important events, such as the founding of the first university west of the Mississippi in 1818. Pierre-Jean De Smet, a



For information about St. Louis events, attractions, restaurants and RV parks, as well as suggested itineraries, contact the St. Louis Convention and Visitors Commission. 800-916-0092 www.explorestlouis.com

young Jesuit priest from Belgium, came to St. Louis in 1823 to establish a Native American school and was soon asked to take over direction of a small college, which in 1832 would be chartered by the state as St. Louis University, locally called SLU, and now one of the top research institutions in the country.

In addition to his administrative work at the university, De Smet established Native American missions in the Northwest and brought peace to warring tribes. A committed friend to Native Americans, who called him Blackrobe, De Smet traveled some

200,000 miles, including 16 crossings to Europe, helping to support them. It was only after his death in 1873 that the Indian wars began in earnest.

Another momentous event in St. Louis history was the Dred Scott case. Among the catalysts of the Civil War, the first two trials, in 1847 and 1850, were held at Old St. Louis County Courthouse, now part of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial run by the National Park Service. One of Scott's pro bono attorneys was Roswell Field, father of renowned St. Louis writer Eugene Field, best known for his children's poetry, including "Little Boy Blue." His boyhood home is open to the public today as the Eugene Field House and St. Louis Toy Museum.

Dred Scott and his wife, Harriet,

No self-respecting St. Louisan would ever call his or her town "St. Looney."



A favorite St. Louis backdrop, the restored 1929 fountain at the foot of the World's Fair Pavilion spouts multicolored water jets.

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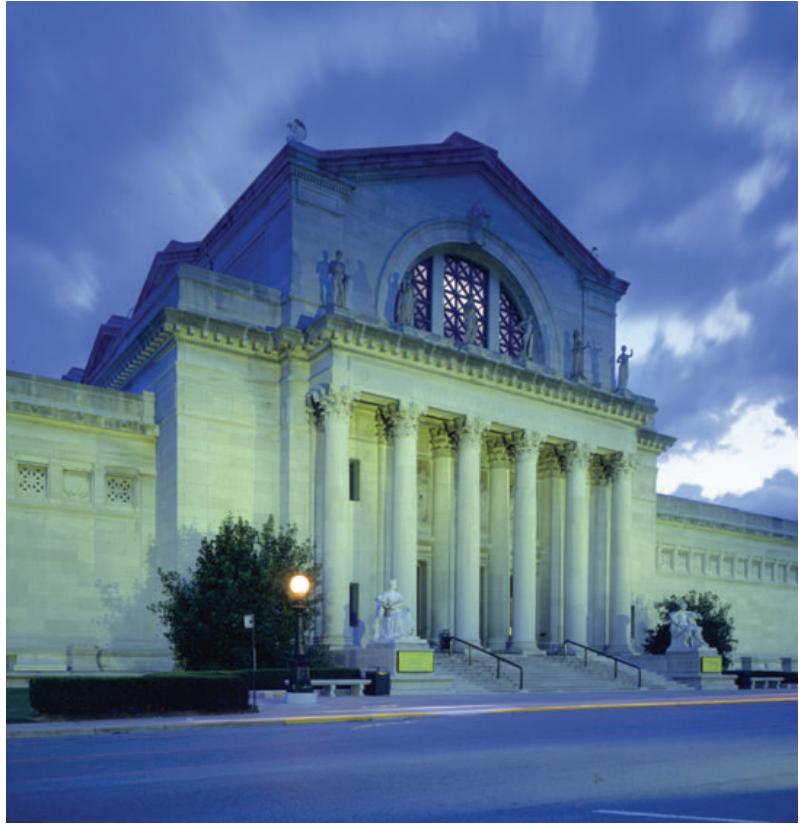
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Happy Birthday, St. Louis!

were slaves who sought their freedom on the grounds that both had lived in free territory. Although they prevailed at trial in St. Louis, they would later lose in the U.S. Supreme Court in a decision that triggered a chain of events that led to war. St. Louis would be the center of military activity in the war's Western campaigns (building gunboats and providing supplies) and emerged from the conflict with its economy booming.

The first rail line from the East had reached East St. Louis four years before the war started, and in 1874, with the completion of engineering marvel Eads Bridge (the first arched steel-truss bridge in the world), it crossed the Mississippi into St. Louis. Union Station, a castlelike limestone structure built in 1894, now a National Historic Landmark, was once the largest and busiest passenger rail terminal in the world.



More than 30,000 paintings, drawings and sculptures rotate through the St. Louis Art Museum (SLAM). The art museum is free, but a fee is charged for special exhibitions.



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In the 1940s the station, with 42 tracks inside its shed, handled 100,000 passengers daily. The famous photo of a grinning Harry Truman holding aloft a copy of the *Chicago Tribune* with the erroneous front-page headline “Dewey Defeats Truman” was shot here. Today, the former terminal is home to a 539-room luxury hotel, shopping center and entertainment complex.

Through the 19th century, St. Louis continued to grow and by 1900 was the fourth largest city in the country (today, the metro-area population of 2.8 million ranks 18th).

Of all of St. Louis’ many fine years — as an industrial giant, center of arts and culture, host to five national political conventions and home of winning sports teams — none is finer than 1904. That was the year the city celebrated the centennial of the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark Expedition with the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, also known as the St. Louis World’s Fair. The



Whether or not you visit with children, don’t miss the choreographed fountains at 2.9-acre Citygarden (left) and the St. Louis Science Center (right), with more than 700 hands-on exhibits.

event, which also included the 1904 Summer Olympics, the first Olympics held in America, ran from April 30 to December 1 and drew nearly two million visitors.

Sprawling across Forest Park and the Washington University campus, the fair included exhibits from 43 of the then-45 states and 62 countries. The fair had many grand buildings, but all

were temporary except the Palace of Fine Arts, which is now home to the St. Louis Art Museum. A few other structures remain, among them the huge walk-through bird cage at the St. Louis Zoo.

The city’s Jefferson Memorial, built in 1913 with proceeds from the fair, commemorated Thomas Jefferson, who had initiated the Louisiana

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Happy Birthday, St. Louis!

Purchase, which doubled the size of the country and included St. Louis. Today, the memorial houses the Missouri History Museum and exhibits that tell the story of St. Louis from its founding to the present day.

Visitors to the fair enjoyed such “new” foods as waffle ice cream cones, hot dogs, hamburgers, peanut butter, iced tea and cotton candy. Dr. Pepper and puffed wheat made their national debuts at the fair.

Music also played a major role. Ragtime composer Scott Joplin’s “The Cascades” was inspired by the waterfalls at Forest Park’s Grand Basin, and the song “Meet Me in St. Louis, Louis” was also fair-inspired, though no self-respecting St. Louisan would ever call his or her town “St. Looney.”

Notable visitors to the lavish event included President Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Edison and John Philip Sousa, whose band played on opening day. Even former Apache Chief Geronimo attended.

St. Louisans may consider 1904 their town’s banner year, but there have been many other significant events over the 25 decades. Soulard Farmers Market, one of the oldest in the country, opened back in 1779 and still operates today. In 1804, Lewis and Clark set out from St. Louis to explore the Louisiana Territory. In 1821, Missouri entered the Union as the 24th state. In 1852 the brewery that became Anheuser-Busch was founded. And 1859 saw the opening of the Missouri Botanical Garden, now considered among the best in the world.

Other important milestone years include 1873, when Susan Blow founded the first kindergarten in the United States in St. Louis; 1876, when the Great Divorce took place, separating St. Louis from St. Louis County (a movement to reunite them is gaining traction today); 1882, when the St. Louis Cardinals begin playing in the National League (they won their 11th World Series in 2011); 1914, when W.C. Handy wrote “St. Louis Blues,” the

most recorded blues song ever; 1927, when Charles Lindbergh flew the *Spirit of St. Louis* across the Atlantic; 1931, when St. Louisan Erma Rombauer published *The Joy of Cooking*, the most successful cookbook in American history; and 1965, when the 630-foot-tall Gateway Arch was completed. Vice President Hubert Humphrey came to dedicate the monument, noting that it “links the rich heritage of yesterday with the richer future of tomorrow.”

St. Louis offers dozens of major attractions, and more are free than anywhere in the country, with the exception of Washington, D.C. Highlights include the American Kennel Club Museum of the Dog, Anheuser-Busch Brewery tours, Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis (with the world’s largest collection of mosaic art — 41 million tiles), City Museum (which includes the World Aquarium), the Endangered Wolf Center, Forest Park (home to the Art Museum, Science Center, Zoo, Jewel Box, History



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Museum, Munny Theatre and a 7.5-mile biking, jogging and skating path), Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site (Grant's Farm), the Holocaust Museum, Jefferson Barracks Historic Park, Laumeier Sculpture Park, Magic House, St. Louis Children's Museum, the Museum of Transportation, the World Bird Sanctuary and the 1834 Old Cathedral.

St. Louis is also home to the country's first interstate highway, the world's first skyscraper, the first ironclad boat and the first library west of the Mississippi. The first lung transplant was performed here, and on a more whimsical note, the first successful parachute jump from a moving plane took place here in 1912.

At the Reenactment of the Founding in February, Mayor Francis Slay said, "Two hundred and fifty years ago, Laclède believed his settlement could someday be one of the finest cities in America. His vision has become reality." 📱

St. Louis Campgrounds and RV Parks

370 Lakeside Park RV Campground

St. Peters, Missouri

636-387-5253

www.stpetersmo.net/rvpark

Thirty miles west of St. Louis, this ADA-compliant campground offers a laundry, a store and 50 RV campsites with full hookups, a patio and fire ring. A trail surrounds the stocked 140-acre lake.

Cahokia RV Parque | Cahokia, Illinois

618-332-7700, www.cahokiarrvparque.com

Just across the river from St. Louis, this Good Sam 8/9.5*/9-rated park provides 119 full-hookup RV campsites (some handicap accessible), plus a lounge, shower facilities, a laundry room, pavilions, a store and an outdoor pool.

Casino Queen RV Park

East St. Louis, Illinois

800-777-0777, www.casinoqueen.com

Across from the Gateway Arch on the other side of the Mississippi, this 9.5/9.5*/8.5-rated Good Sam Park has 130 full-hookup sites, an indoor pool, a store and handicap accessibility.

KOA Granite City Campground

Granite City, Illinois

800-562-5861 or 618-931-5160

www.koa.com

This 9/9.5*/9-rated KOA park across the river in Illinois has 100 full-hookup sites, rental cabins, an outdoor pool, a store, a playground and limited handicap accessibility.

St. Louis RV Park | St. Louis, Missouri

800-878-3330 or 314-241-3330

www.stlouisrvpark.com

The only RV park in downtown St. Louis, this 8.5/9.5*/4.5-rated campground has 100 full-hookup sites, an outdoor pool, a store and some handicap accessibility.

Sundermeier RV Park | St. Charles, Missouri

800-929-0832 or 636-940-0111

www.sundermeierrvpark.com

Rated 8.5/10*/9, this handicap-accessible Good Sam Park has 106 full-hookup sites (including some pull-throughs) with patios, 30- and 50-amp electric service, cable TV and free Wi-Fi, about 20 miles west of St. Louis.



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MINNESOTA'S SLOW LANE

There's no such thing as rush hour in the Prairie Waters region, where the locals are laidback,

article and photos by Tom Watson





the tall grass waves a lazy greeting and even the rivers take their time

It's not until you venture off the highway and onto the less-traveled county roads that you realize there's more beneath southwestern Minnesota's open sky than an endless sea of corn and sugar beets, something hidden in plain sight. That something is the region known as Prairie Waters.

Prairie Waters begins at the

headwaters of the Minnesota River at Big Stone Lake on the western border of Minnesota and South Dakota. Flowing east from Ortonville, the river winds through Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge and then widens, first to form Marsh Lake and then again at Lac qui Parle Lake on its journey across the southern section of Minnesota.

It's a landscape that at first seems endlessly mundane but reveals itself as tree-lined rivers to kayak across and rocky outcroppings to scramble over. Its waters brim with walleye, crappie, northern pike and catfish. Its prairies sing with birds and sway with a summer-long assortment of wildflowers.



In Montevideo, visitors time travel to the late 1800s at Historic Chippewa City, a meticulously restored prairie town with a bank, a blacksmith shop and a one-room schoolhouse.

STOP AND SMELL THE WILDFLOWERS

The most relaxing and rewarding way to enjoy the treasures of Prairie Waters is to travel the backroads. Several picturesque routes intersect here, from the Glacier Ridge Trail in the northeast corner to a section of the King of Trails, Highway 75, one of America's oldest designated scenic drives. Minnesota's 600-mile Prairie Passage route showcases the virgin prairie still remaining along the state's western side.

RVers can spend a memorable day on the 287-mile Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway, which follows the river along a series of roads, but to really experience the nationally designated route, it's best to linger. Life moves at a slower pace in the valley, and while you're here, you should, too.

Ease off the gas pedal and enjoy the scenery of farmland, woods and river towns along the way. Stop for lunch at a mom-and-pop restaurant or pull over for a picnic at a state park. Stroll through the big bluestem prairie grasses and watch for butterflies among the yellow coneflowers.

To make the most of your travels, visit the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway website, www.mnrivervalley.com. There you'll find sample itineraries, from touring historic sites and wildlife refuges to browsing for antiques and cruising Big Stone Lake.

Geologically speaking, the region offers textbook vistas of recent Ice Age actions that sculpted this part of the state and played a role in forming other regions as well. Lake Agassiz was a glacial lake so expansive that its shoreline stretched across the Midwest into the upper reaches of Canada's central provinces. As the ice melted, the lake swelled until its banks

literally burst, sending forceful rivers of meltwater scouring the region. The Great River Warren formed a shallow but wide valley through which the Minnesota River and even the Mississippi flow today.

As the land recoiled from the massive weight of glaciers, numerous valleys formed from runoff of more glacial melt. Those watersheds make up the major rivers of Prairie Waters: the Chippewa, Pomme de Terre, Lac qui Parle, Yellow Medicine and the Minnesota itself. Along with the



The three Minnesota counties outlined in yellow — Chippewa, Lac qui Parle and Swift — make up the Prairie Waters region. Neighboring Big Stone County to the northwest and Yellow Medicine County to the south are part of the greater Prairie Waters community.



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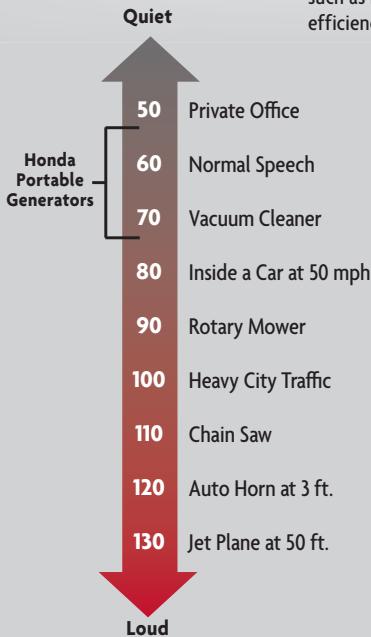
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MINNESOTA'S SLOW LANE

region's many lakes, the rivers of Prairie Waters attract paddlers, anglers, hunters and birders from all across the Midwest.

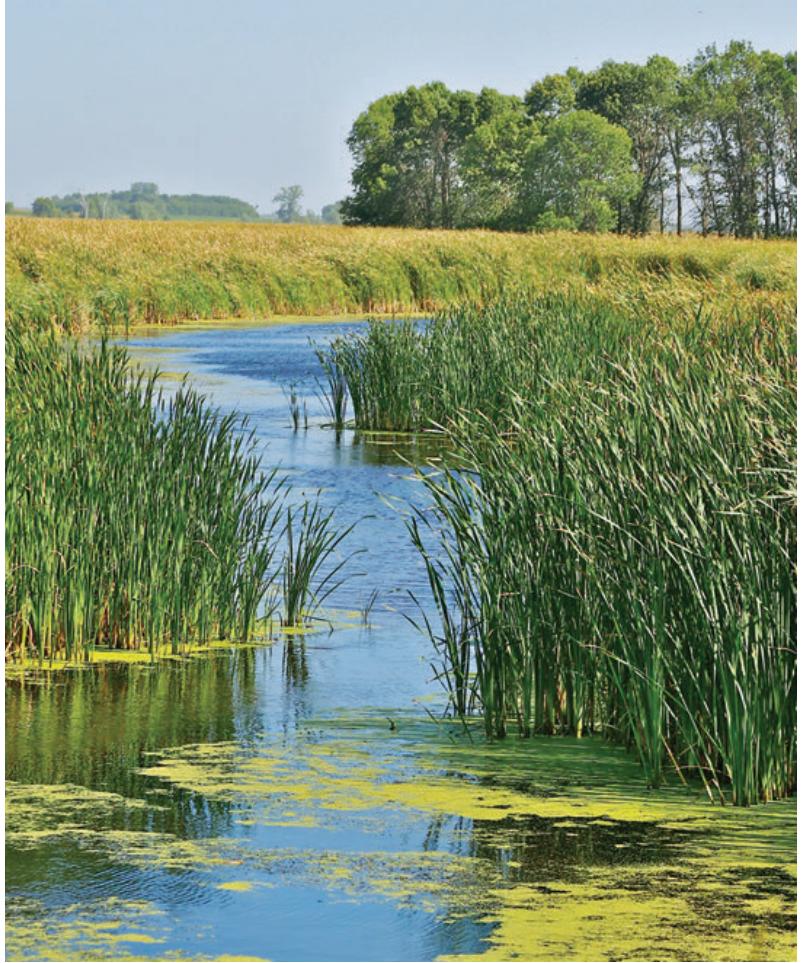
The pace here is country-road peaceful, although the waterways teem with life, from Minnesota's largest rookery of white pelicans at Marsh Lake to the thousands of Canada geese that fly in and out of Lac qui Parle Lake throughout the year.

HISTORY AND HERITAGE

Despite the region's seemingly slow pace, it would be shortsighted to mistake the locals' outwardly laidback nature as a sign of idleness. Agriculture is the economic engine of the region with many farms owned and operated by fifth-generation family members.

Don't let the miles of industry-grid fields of corn cloud your view. A network of green routes has been established all across Prairie Waters by farmers who raise varieties of eco-

The rivers and marshes of southwestern Minnesota attract nesting white pelicans, sandhill cranes, tundra swans, snow geese and Canada geese.



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friendly products, from organic jam to free-range chickens and chemical-free eggs. Markets throughout the region offer local produce as well.

The region's Norwegian heritage can be felt everywhere, from restaurant menus to art forms. The Milan Village Arts School regularly offers classes in rosemaling (decorative painting on

wood) and other Scandinavian folk arts. Lutfisk suppers are common at churches in most communities, and the city of Madison calls itself the Lutfisk Capital of America.

Nowhere is the pride of heritage more evident than in the many museums throughout the Prairie Waters region. Both Ortonville's Big



Throughout the Prairie Waters region, powwows connect Native Americans with their history.

WHERE THE WILDFOWL ARE

Shallow marshes fringe the first 45 miles of the Minnesota River, and the upper portion flows through a chain of waterways — from Big Stone Lake near Ortonville to Marsh Lake near Appleton — helping to make the Prairie Waters region one of North America's major waterfowl flyways.

Marsh Lake is the place to see the graceful American white pelican. Rivaling trumpeter swans as the widest birds native to North America, white pelicans have a wingspan of up to 9½ feet. More than 13,000 of the state's nearly 16,000 pairs nest in the wetlands surrounding Marsh Lake.



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MINNESOTA'S SLOW LANE

Stone County Museum and Historic Chippewa City in Montevideo feature pioneer village settings depicting life on the prairies from the late 1800s. Swensson Farm and the mission at Lac qui Parle are among the region's other historic sites.

Many of these landmarks were featured in the 2005 movie *Sweetland*, a film shot in and around Montevideo. It offers an enchanting picture of rural immigrant life in the Prairie Waters region in the early 1900s.

The Minnesota Machinery Museum in Hanley Falls gives visitors a nostalgic glimpse of early life on the farm. Working machinery is showcased here — from old-fashioned threshing machines to gas-engine washing machines to nearly every brand and model of tractor ever made — either as part of the museum's regular exhibits or during the annual Threshing Show, August 2 and 3 this year.

Other historic sites offer glimpses of the struggle between Native



Established in 1922, Ortonville Municipal Golf Course is one of the region's many picturesque golf links, from friendly nine-holers to challenging 18-hole layouts.

Americans and encroaching settlers in the region. Several historic landmarks pay tribute to the area's Sioux heritage.

Southern Minnesota is also noted for its golf courses, and Prairie Waters has its share, from cornfield-turned-fairways nine-holers in the smaller communities to the sweeping,

rolling links of the 18-hole courses in Ortonville and Montevideo.

The richness of Prairie Waters is revealed in its natural bounty, its culture and its people, but to really get to know the region you need to exit the interstate and spend some time traveling the backroads. 🚗

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In the past few years, RV campsites have multiplied in the Prairie Waters region, from Lac qui Parle State Park's new upper campground to the area's only casino, Prairie's Edge.

Lac qui Parle State Park, Watson

320-734-4450

www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/lac_qui_parle

The newer upper campground has nine full-hookup campsites and 37 electric-only sites. The lower campground has 24 sites, including 10 with electric hookups.

Lakeshore RV Park, Ortonville

800-936-7386, www.lakeshorervpark.com

On Big Stone Lake, this Good Sam-rated 8/9*/8 RV park has 94 sites, including some pull-throughs.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

866-857-2757, www.dnr.state.mn.us/camping

Minnesota has more than 5,000 campsites at state parks and another 1,000 sites at state forests.



PrairieView RV Park and Campground, Granite Falls

320-564-6043, www.prairiesedgecasino.com

Adjacent to Prairie's Edge Casino Resort, this 10/10*/10-rated RV park has 55 campsites, including 26 full-hookup pull-throughs.

Stone Hill Park, Canby

507-223-7586, www.lqpywatershed.org

Part of the Lac qui Parle Yellow Bank Watershed District, Stone Hill Park overlooks tranquil Del Clark Lake. Most of the park's 64 RV campsites have electric, water and sewer hookups.

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article by **Bob Livingston** photos by **Scott Hirko**

Destination 36RL

Winnebago Towables enters the luxury fifth-wheel field with a stylish body and a long list of features

It's hard to imagine the Winnebago nameplate on anything but a motorhome. The name is so common, it's not unusual to hear those outside the RV lifestyle refer to all motorhomes as Winnebagos; the name is probably the most generic description of motorhomes on the planet. Not bad for a company that emerged in a small Iowa town that used to be called Puckerbrush before it was renamed Forest City.

So when Winnebago started building trailers and fifth-wheels three-and-a-half years ago, diehard motorhome owners and serious trailer enthusiasts were scratching their heads. "What does Winnebago know about building trailers?" Fact is, Winnebago built trailers before motorhomes back in 1958 and came out of its trailer-building hiatus when it bought long-established trailer and fifth-wheel manufacturer SunnyBrook. The move jump-started the process of Winnebago re-emerging as a towable contender.

The synergies were obvious; Winnebago easily capitalized on its ability to produce highly livable motorhomes and transferred much of that expertise into its first towables aimed at the light-weight side of the market. It was only a matter of time before the company would venture into the luxury side of things, and the

Destination is its first fifth-wheel loaded with amenities and earmarked for the full-time — and long-term — crowd.

What rolled off the assembly line looks nothing like the other Winnebago towables. Sweeping lines, frameless tinted windows and a low profile set the Destination 36RL apart from the others in its fifth-wheel line in a grand way. Add a dramatically designed, painted rear cap to complement handsome body graphics, and this fifth-wheel is a sure attention-getter wherever it wanders.

The low profile, a big part of the illusion of making a 13-foot-tall fifth-wheel look less imposing, made us suspicious of ground clearance problems right from the start. Our concerns that the fifth-wheel would drag on driveways and undulating roads would have been dismissed if it weren't for the front landing jacks that had only 3½ inches of ground clearance. The front jacks are part of an automatic six-point hydraulic leveling system, and they dragged when the terrain varied. The bone-chilling scraping sound was disconcerting, but in reality the jacks lost only a few microns of metal each time — and left scars on the pavement.

Repositioning the front jacks to allow additional ground



SPECIFICATIONS

WINNEBAGO DESTINATION 36RL

Exterior Length	37' 4"
Exterior Width	8' 4"
Exterior Height	13' 2"
Interior Width	8' 0"
Interior Height	7' 6"; bedroom 6' 8"
Construction	12" I-beam main rails, welded aluminum walls and floor, laminated sidewalls with block-foam insulation, 5" arched aluminum roof rafters with fiberglass insulation, TPO membrane, high-gloss gelcoat fiberglass exterior, painted front and rear caps
Freshwater Cap.	108 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	33/66 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water Heater Cap.	10 gal.
Refrigerator	21 cu. ft.
Furnace	35,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	15,000 Btu
Converter	50 amp
Inverter	1,200 watt
Battery	(2) 12-volt
Tires	235/80R16 LRE
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no cargo)	12,900 lbs.
Hitch Weight	2,840 lbs.
Axle Weight	10,060 lbs.
GVWR	15,500 lbs.
GAWR	7,000 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Capacity	2,600 lbs.
Base MSRP	\$65,243
As-Tested MSRP	\$90,144
Basic Warranty	12 months

Winnebago Industries Towables

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winnebagotowables.com/destination

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(Left) Dramatic lines and large windows add exterior appeal to the Destination. (Above) Island sinks and theater seating across from the entertainment center are interior focal points.

clearance is certainly in order, and while the engineers are at it, they might take a look at where the control panel is located. It's on the front wall inside the street-side compartment and requires one to crouch down and twist his or her head to use the controls and view the screen. In this position, there's no way to see kingpin positioning while hitching and unhitching without going back and forth — or soliciting a second person. Overall, the convenience of auto leveling is appreciated, but location of the controls is questionable. Also, the memory function was not accurate.

Interestingly, the 37-footer, weighing in at 12,900 pounds without cargo, doesn't feel big or heavy, which might be attributable to the stout Ford F-350 dually used to tow it. On the road it behaved beautifully and was maneuvered easily into conventional RV spaces; even shoehorning into a very tight site, which took some jockeying because of the long crew cab, was not overly stressful. Overall, we felt good about towing the Destination — and appreciated the Equa-Flex suspension and optional quad shock absorbers and Trailair Rota-Flex pin box.

Hitching and unhitching are a two-person process because insufficient clearance makes it impossible to drop the tailgate fully when hitched. A second person has to support the tailgate as the truck is moved into hitching position — unless the tailgate is swapped for a

louvered aftermarket replacement with a notched section designed to clear the kingpin box. A patient person can do it in a pinch with the factory tailgate, but it will require moving cautiously, stopping and getting out of the cab when there is just enough clearance before and/or after latching the kingpin. The stubby "cabover" section of the fifth-wheel certainly enhances the overall look of the exterior, but operator miscalculation will result in damage to the front of the trailer and tailgate. And by the way, the Ford tailgate is rather heavy.

Setting up in the park is a pleasurable experience, with easy access to the intuitive utility center and large pass-through storage compartment. Side-opening doors with slam-latch hardware make it convenient to retrieve and store gear, and the area is well finished. The front compartment increases capacity, but if a generator prep package is ordered, items stored in this area will be subject to the outside elements. Cutouts in the metal pan facilitate the generator installation, but the holes prevent the compartment from being water- and dirt-tight. If the owner decides to forgo the generator, he or she will have to add weather-tight flooring on top of the metal cutouts.

Three slideouts, two opposing in the living room/galley area and one in the bedroom, open the interior, exposing a popular floorplan. Focal points are the

extra-large stationary island with double stainless sinks and designer faucet, and the street-side entertainment center across from theater seating for two.

All the elements in the lower portion of this fifth-wheel work in harmony to keep the occupants from missing their stationary homes. Whether entertaining guests or preparing a nice dinner for two, the kitchen serves the cook well. Most prep work will take place on the

island counter, but the oven and range cubbyhole and hutch counter supplement nicely. Cold food is stored in the 21-cubic-foot residential refrigerator that's tied to a pair of 12-volt batteries and a 1,200-watt power inverter to keep it running while on the road.

There is a ton of storage in the galley area, highlighted by the full-length pantry with a standard door. Large items can be stashed in the space below the island structure, including placement of a trash container. The rounded edges create space to display knickknacks on shelves in the back section, where an optional dishwasher can be installed if desired — a good plan for those who want one. On the opposite end is a mystery cabinet. It opens — which is nice — but I never did figure out what to store in this area.

Cabinets and shelving abound, and are good quality, but you won't find a place for utensils and other implements normally stored in the kitchen. That's because there are no exposed drawers! I'm not sure what the designers were thinking here, but if they figured the three large drawers inside the pantry

would suffice, they missed the target.

Nevertheless, it feels good to hang out in the main living area. The theater seating is super comfortable and has a direct, no-neck-burning view of the 50-inch TV. Planners did a sensational job of flush-mounting the TV in the entertainment structure, but it did cause a chuckle. The nice-looking wood frame covers the infrared eye, which makes it impossible to turn on the TV or change channels — even the manual buttons on the side are covered, preventing access. Nudging the remote to a crack in the corner of the frame did the trick, and we recognize this is a pretty easy fix, though humorous. Also, we never did find the connections for components like a DVD player or satellite dish.

Below the TV is a fireplace with controls to circulate heated air, which helped neutralize the early morning chill in mid-40-degree F temperatures. A concealed desk in the entertainment structure pulls out and flips open to store flat items — nice touch for computer users who don't want to hog up the freestanding dinette, but their feet will have to squish next to the fireplace glass when seated in a



The bathroom shower is almost residential in size. The lavatory sink is on the small side, but the abundance of cabinetry makes it easy to handle toiletries.

chair in front of the desk.

Above the TV is a stereo unit with all the accoutrements of modern-day music listening, and it's tied into a redundant component that adds Bluetooth capability. Sound in the living room comes from this component, with independent speakers in the bedroom ceiling and outside. Speaker placement outside is in-



A full-length pantry offers space for plenty of groceries and kitchenware. The range and microwave oven are tucked in behind a generous-size island counter. Cold food is stored in the 21-cubic-foot residential refrigerator next to the hutch.

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teresting. Two speakers are mounted in the wall of the patio-side slideout, which is not where occupants will typically sit. They do a good job of entertaining the plants, but those sitting under the awning will have no idea music is playing. Not sure why the speakers are not in the wall under the awning.

The rear living room is a great place to relax or entertain. Large windows provide exceptional outside visibility, and the couch along the back wall is comfortable. Simulated wood flooring (linoleum) takes the worry out of soiling carpeting, and MCD solar/blackout roller shades add window-covering versatility. The ceiling fan helped circulate the ambient air, but the windows barely open, so it was tough to keep the place comfortable in 80-degree F temperatures, even with the use of the Fan-Tastic Vent fan. Ambient air circulation was further impeded by the lack of a screen door at the entryway. A large window fitted into the entry door — half of which can be opened — took the place of a standard screen door.



[Above left] The king bed articulates and moves out in the slideout. The front closet has mirrored sliding doors that lead to a huge wardrobe and storage area. Shelves inside the closet help organize shoes and other items. The louvered door next to the wardrobe leads to an area that can be fitted with a stacked washer/dryer. **[Above right]** The truck tailgate cannot be dropped fully when hitching and unhitching, which complicates the process.



This approach is not well thought out, and there were no provisions for covering the window for privacy.

Use of the single 15,000-Btu air conditioner was just about futile, even with the ceiling fan spinning at full speed; high ceilings (even in the curbside slideout) and overall square footage impacted cooling capabilities. We did enjoy the almost silent operation of the air condi-

tioner, a testament to proper duct routing and good insulation. We'd opt for the second air conditioner in the bedroom, since the bedroom windows have limited openings, but would probably miss the roof vent that could be fitted with a second Fan-Tastic Vent down the road.

Two steps lead to a narrow hallway that connects the bathroom and bedroom with the rest of the fifth-wheel.

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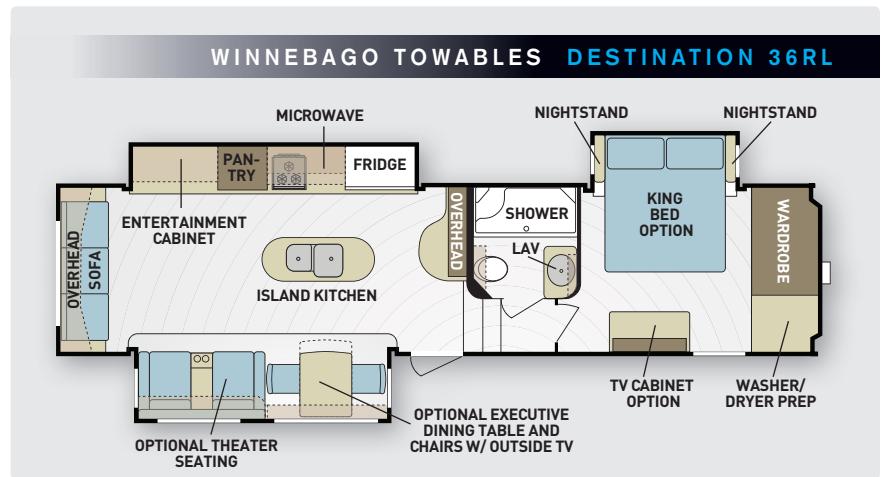
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Those who prefer to luxuriate in a large shower will be all smiles in this bathroom. Full-length showers with double sliding doors are showing up in a number of RVs these days, and it's worth the space allocation. Close proximity of the 10-gallon gas/electric water heater to the bathroom faucets made hot-water delivery very fast. This is an asset for those who need to conserve water in a primitive environment, but the lack of a shut-off valve in the shower wand kind of negated the benefit.

There's not an abundance of floor space, but the bathroom is roomy enough to get the job done without claustrophobia. Counter space around the sink is limited, but toiletries can be stored in the nearby cabinets and accessed very easily. All the cabinet doors in the rig are fitted with heavy-duty hinges, which fling them open with great velocity. The idea is to provide durable hardware that holds the doors open without effort, but they slam into adjacent structures and walls, making



a nasty noise as the metal door handles make contact. I suppose users could learn to hold the doors until they stop, but we were especially concerned that the cabinet door slamming into the glass shower door might eventually cause breakage down the road. Restraining cables or non-spring-loaded hardware should be fitted to doors where complete opening is restricted.

The front of the rig is reserved for the bedroom, which is very inviting. The memory foam mattress on the king-size platform is relatively comfortable, and the room has all the amenities to facilitate long-term living. The front walk-in wardrobe is huge and has strategically placed shelving that promotes organization of clothing, shoes and other items. Next to the wardrobe is a washer-and-

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dryer-ready closet designed to handle a stacker system. At the foot of the bed is a chest of drawers with plenty of space for daily wear, and a TV is smartly placed within this cabinetry.

While the room has enough space to walk around the king bed when the slide is extended, through traffic to the closet is blocked when the rig is in travel mode. Even getting to this point requires the head of the bed to articulate up for additional clearance. The power mechanism to move the bed is controlled by one switch on the wall and a second next to the bed. The assumption here is that the head of the bed can be lifted for reading or watching TV. Great idea, as long as no one leans on the mattress; once any weight (upper back and head) is placed on the lifted portion, it returns to flat, defeating the purpose of the mechanism — and then has the audacity to flash warning lights all night long until the mattress is lifted slightly, which won't work as long as people are on the mattress. Get the picture?

We like to read in bed, so the two overhead LED light fixtures on flexible shafts were a welcome sight, until we used them. They would have been perfect if our arms were 2 feet longer, so the light could be directed on the book. Of course, this is a simple fix at the factory level. There are plenty of LED light fixtures throughout the interior, making it easy to illuminate just about any area. Switch placement could be improved, though.

For example, accessing the bathroom from the bedroom at night can be problematic. The door to the bathroom opens from the left, which means the user has to go down the steps to get out of the way of the swinging door, because of the narrow hallway. The light in the hallway that illuminates these steps is in the galley hatch, along with most of the controls for the trailer systems. If the user doesn't want to wake the other person in the bedroom with bright lights, he or she will have to negotiate the steps in the dark to either find the light switch or make room to open the bathroom

door. To prevent accidents, the addition of a switch to operate a hallway nightlight would be welcome. A light switch should also be added to the entryway to keep from repeating the above scenario when entering the rig in the dark.

After spending time in the Destination and analyzing Winnebago's approach to fifth-wheels, I can't help but think of the children's book *The Little Engine That Could*. The thought process behind developing a luxury fifth-wheel — with cues taken from the company's highly regarded motorhome division — is truly optimistic. Construction techniques and materials are top-notch; the execution needs some work.

Winnebago is resilient, and even though it cut its teeth on building trailers, it's been a long time since the company directed any energy toward building towables. Stay tuned; a few tweaks, modifications and improvements will make the Destination a viable player for fifth-wheel aficionados looking for luxury and stylish curb appeal. 🚐

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article and photos by John L. Stein

Ram 2500 Outdoorsman

Dirt bikes, deserts and camping fit together perfectly. But it's a gritty, dusty business when the winds kick up. Towing a toy hauler with a refined four-wheel-drive crew cab changes the experience

As a lifelong dirt bike guy, over the years I've explored virtually every way of hauling bikes, gear and passengers to our off-road adventures. Pickups, vans, cars with trailers, pickups with trailers, motorhomes with trailers and even a bike strapped on top of a car. Depending on the circumstances, each method has its strengths and limitations. But decade after decade, there is no denying that a good, stout full-size pickup stands tall in versatility and capability.

Consider the bandwidth of a pickup like the Ram 2500 Outdoorsman, carrying an MSRP of \$49,845 as tested. With four doors and 4.3 feet of bed width between wheel wells, it can hold up to six passengers and three dirt bikes (four in a pinch). Properly outfitted, it can tow up to 12,500 pounds, if you want to haul a rolling motel along behind you. And thanks to steady advancements in seating comfort, insulation, powertrain and suspension systems, it's nearly as comfortable as a luxury car inside. It's a bunch roomier, too.

Ram reports that some 70 percent of its pickup buyers participate in some sort of outdoor recreation, and thus the suitably named Outdoorsman is config-

ured just for people like us. We put one to the test by pulling an XLR Hyper Lite 27HFS toy-box trailer into the Southern California desert for a weeklong riding trip. Including three motorcycles, a full tank of fresh water and personal effects, the trailer weighed a bit more than 7,000 pounds — vastly within the Ram 2500's towing capacity. Still, more than 3 tons of weight necessitated a worthy hitch, and so our supplying Hyper Lite dealer, Camping World of Bakersfield, California, outfitted the Ram with a weight-distribution hitch and friction-type sway control.

The dynamic performance of the Ram with the trailer was impressive. Despite the unfortunate timing of strong

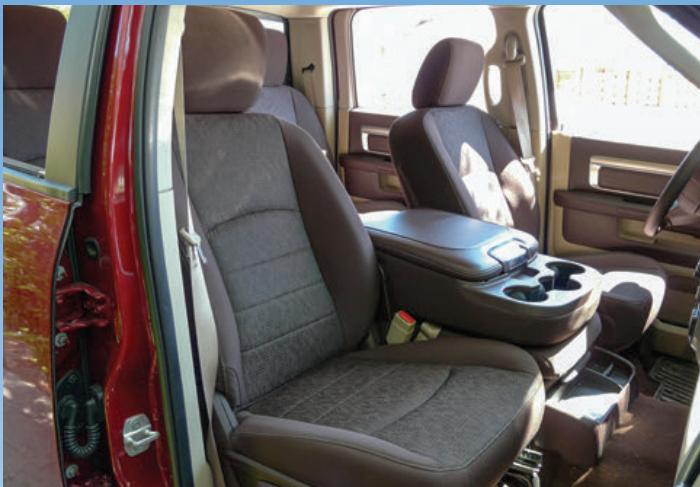
desert winds — at times exceeding 60 MPH — the trailer towed extremely well. Even the combination of side winds and passing semitrucks never shook the solid feel of the Ram and trailer. I am sure that the excellent hitch assembly played a part in this, but there's no denying that the Ram led the way. Its solid-axle front and rear suspension with coil springs and trailing arms (instead of traditional rear leaf springs) proved extremely capable under duress.

Stability is a huge safety issue in towing, but so is an often-overlooked feature — brakes. The Ram's big four-wheel discs with twin-piston calipers did an admirable job of getting the combination slowed, and the additional advantage of a standard trailer-brake controller, located within easy reach on the instrument panel, provided a welcome extra level of braking force on demand.

Aside from stability, there's nothing more important in a tow vehicle than power. The traditional mainstream



With its optional 6.4-liter gas V-8 delivering 410 horsepower and 429 lb-ft of torque, the Ram 2500 Outdoorsman pulled 7,000 pounds of XLR Hyper Lite trailer and motorcycles with ease.



(Above left and middle) Front storage console flips up to reveal a jump seat, while raising rear seat reveals handy storage bins. (Above far right) Touch-screen displays navigation and audio-system functions.

choices of gas or diesel V-8s are being widened today with turbo V-6s, but the Ram 2500 Outdoorsman relies on Ram's well-proven 6.4-liter gas V-8. Producing 410 horsepower and 429 LB-FT of torque, the \$1,495 optional Hemi proved way above adequate in acceleration, grade climbing and even passing power.

Although full-size pickups now routinely approach and even surpass 20 MPG on the road without trailers, towing still extracts a toll on fuel economy, and the Ram/Hyper Lite combination factored in at 8.2 MPG average for our 700-mile trip. With its generously sized 31-gallon fuel tank

for reduced fuel stops, the Ram still required more than \$100 a tank to fill. That's not exactly cheap, but then again, neither is a week's worth of motels and breakfast, lunch and dinner out for all passengers. And so, despite essentially doubling the fuel bill compared to an empty pickup, the benefits of riding and camping for multiple days simply can't be duplicated at motels and fast-food joints.

Transmissions often receive less attention than engines when buyers are looking at new trucks, but they are almost as deserving of notice. The smaller ratio gaps afforded by the Ram's six-speed automatic reduce

noise, offer smoother shifting and run the engine closer to peak efficiency than wider-ratio four-speed transmissions of recent years. The end result is a much more pleasant travel experience and improved fuel economy. In the Ram's case, a tow/haul feature and manual mode further increase driver control when pulling a trailer up and down grades.

Our dirt bike destination was near the enormous Johnson Valley off-road area near Lucerne, California. Pulling off the pavement here and taking in the expansive sweep of the horizon was a reminder of just how wild the desert is — and how far from help you can easily get yourself. That is why the Outdoorsman's electronically selectable 2WD/4WD system was so valuable. Pulling 7,000-plus pounds of tandem-axle trailer along a good hard-packed



(Left) The Hyper Lite's rear door doubles as a loading ramp. (Below) There's room for three dirt bikes — or four in a pinch.





dirt road is easy enough with a 2WD vehicle, but throw in sand, grades and off-camber sections, rocks and ruts, and most especially mud, and having 4WD becomes essential for getting in and out safely.

SoCal's desert threw everything but mud at us, and the Ram's system worked well in all of it, with just one or two instances of needing to engage 4WD Low to get turned around in sand. The aggressively lugged Firestone Transforce AT LT275/70R18 tires helped enormously here and didn't penalize us with excessive road din on the highway. The tires run

60 PSI in front and 80 PSI in back, helping to increase their workload while also maximizing fuel economy. Two giant steel tow hooks in front help you help others, or yourself, should anyone get stuck.

So the baseline requirements of dynamic stability, braking capability, power and transmission, and off-highway performance all checked out strongly for the Outdoorsman. For our purposes, the next level of importance was storage capacity. As mentioned above, the bed is plenty wide enough between the wheel wells to accept the often-cited sheet of 4 x 8-foot plywood. However, the standard bed length of 6.4 feet is not long enough to store multiple motorcycles with the tailgate closed. (The bed length grows nearly 2 feet with the tailgate down, however it's impractical or impossible to drive this way with a trailer.)

Fortunately, the dedicated storage area at the rear of the Hyper Lite trailer accommodated three dirt bikes and our gear bags easily, leaving just one additional dirt bike, a portable Yamaha EF2800i generator, gas cans, tools, a loading ramp and a few sundries for the pickup bed. Even so, the tailgate would close only with the bike skewed slightly sideways, and while this was an acceptable solution for us, two or more dirt bikes are best accommodated in an 8-foot bed, although that adds to a truck's wheelbase, reducing maneuverability and adding costs. Everything is a compromise.

Two of the best utility features of the Outdoorsman are its



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sprayed-on bed liner and its built-in fifth-wheel hitch anchor points. The spray-on liner takes the worry out of scratching a paint finish with cargo (and it always happens), and its grippy surface texture helps keep items from sliding around during transit. And although the travel trailer connected via a typical Class IV hitch, having integrated attachment points for mounting a fifth-wheel hitch further expands your options. Steel tie-down rings welded into the corners of the truck bed provide strong attachment points for bike tie-downs. And in an unusual feature, the tailgate locks right along with the doors using the remote key fob, fully securing the truck bed when the folding tonneau is installed.

Incidentally, for \$475 Ram offers a stowable tent sized to fit the Ram's bed, adding camping capability with a minimum of additional equipment, when extra guests tag along. You can find it in the lifestyle accessories section at www.mopar.com. One other plus for the Ram is a rearview camera that lets the driver check on the bed contents onscreen.

The race to infuse maximum features into vehicles continues in the pickup ranks. Inside the Ram are several innovative solutions, such as under-floor storage areas behind the



(Top right) The Outdoorsman's optional towing mirrors improve driver confidence and safety. **(Right)** Twin glove boxes, 120-volt AC and 12-volt DC outlets provide plenty of space for paperwork and power to run electronic devices.

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front seats. Accessed by a hinged panel beneath the rear floor mats, each is sized about like a six-pack and can hold occasionally used items such as tow lines, ties-downs, window cleaners and cloth, conveniently placed but out of the way. The bins can also keep cell phones, wallets and other valuables out of sight while you are off adventuring away from the vehicle — although ironically, these secret bins are visible below the truck, near the huge boxed ladder frame, to anyone with attentive eyes.

The Outdoorsman has a multi-purpose rear bench seat. The lower cushions fold up and rearward in two sections, maximizing floor area for storing large items that you don't want out in the weather, such as electronics, appliance boxes or pets in their cages. Beneath the seat are versatile flip-up bins that help keep modestly sized items such as power tools from sliding around in the interior. Burly rubber floor mats protect the carpeting front and rear. And lastly, a power sliding rear window

SPECIFICATIONS

2014 RAM 2500 OUTDOORSMAN CREW CAB 4X4

Fuel Economy, Solo	11.5 mpg
Towing	8.2 mpg
Engine	6.4-L V-8
Horsepower	410 5,600 rpm
Torque	429 lb-ft 4,000 rpm
Transmission	6-speed automatic
Axle Ratio	3.73:1
Fuel Cap.	31.0 gal.
Tires	LT275/70R18
Suspension, Front	Three-link, solid axle, coil springs

Suspension, Rear	5-link, solid axle, coil springs
Brakes	Four-wheel disc with ABS
Tow Rating	12,500 lbs.
GVWR	10,000 lbs.
GCWR	19,500 lbs.
Weight, as tested	6,850 lbs.
Length	19' 9"
Wheelbase	149.3"
MSRP, base	\$40,815
MSRP, as tested	\$49,845
Basic Warranty	3 years/36,000 miles

Ram Trucks

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helps let out stuffy air quickly. Headroom, shoulder room and legroom are all excellent, meaning that the crew-cab Ram can truly serve as a comfortable tourer as well as a utility vehicle.

The command center is, naturally,

the driver's seat. In the Outdoorsman's case, the accoutrements include a 10-way power adjustability that makes finding just the right level of support easy. This includes power lumbar support, which can be an essential ally

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during long towing days (or after a little bit too much outdoor activity!). In a handy diversion from the typical practice of providing twin captain's chair seating, the Outdoorsman has a three-passenger front seat, with the center perch accessible by flipping up a multilevel console sized to hold an iPad or other portable electronics. While occasionally useful, this extra seat does not adjust, meaning that knees of taller passengers may touch the instrument panel. The jump seat also lacks a dedicated airbag or shoulder harness, although it does have its own seatbelt. As a result, it is best for occasional use. Seat and steering wheel heaters expand usefulness in cold climates.

The color multi-information display (MID) that is now standard on many vehicles is present here, with a huge range of information and data available. MID features on the Outdoorsman include individual tire pressures, audio system, fuel economy, remaining fuel range, outside temperature and more.

Accessing all the features takes time and practice, but once the system is learned, much of the information is highly useful. For instance, knowing the remaining fuel range lets you extend your driving stints, and knowing individual tire pressures adds peace of mind, while letting you spot a tire puncture early. Measuring 7.4 inches, the color navigation screen isn't the largest in the business, and the inability to enter destinations on the fly is inconvenient, albeit an excellent safety feature. Nevertheless, it's indisputably a great travel aid.

With portable electronics now central in our lives, interfacing them with our vehicles has become important. To suit, the Outdoorsman has a 120-volt AC, 150-watt outlet, three 12-volt DC power ports, USB and MP3 ports and an SD memory card reader all within easy reach in the front seating area. There are also twin glove boxes and various storage bins. This isn't just handy; it's essential for keeping the

peace and people connected as they strive to get out of town and away from it all. That little irony is inescapable when you consider that the Outdoorsman helps you escape those very things in the great outdoors.

Personally, after years of roughing it with bikes in the dust and wind, heat and snow, and dodging scorpions, mosquitoes and even cougars, I was more than happy to study how an off-road adventure could play out if one stepped up and corralled all the right equipment in a toy hauler. I'm happy to report that after a week with the Ram 2500 Outdoorsman crew cab 4x4, the 27-foot Hyper Lite trailer and a trio of competent new dirt bikes, I like it just fine. The key was the steady, capable and comfortable pickup, followed by the roomy and accommodating living quarters with plenty of bike storage. But surprisingly, the feature I liked best of all was actually the simplest — the doors. They kept the clean inside and the dirt outside. Right where it belongs. 🚚

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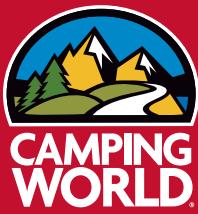
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Venture to the Summit

A Sonic travel trailer and Grand Cherokee make for happy camping

As a young lad, I spent many a weekend in my parents' travel trailer. It was nothing fancy, but even today, I remember it as being cozy and comfortable, with all the things we really needed for a family vacation. Since then, I've longed for a travel trailer with the same qualities, but many entry-level trailers are too cheaply built for my tastes or lack the essential ingredient every small trailer should have: charm.

The Sonic from Venture RV is pretty much what I had in mind. The 22-foot, 10-inch SN190VRB floorplan features a front queen bed, midship galley and dinette, and a rear bath. No slideouts, no bells and whistles, just a well-conceived package that gets it right in the most important areas.

Starting with the exterior, the Sonic features a rounded front cap for improved aerodynamics, and the line continues to the roof before tapering down at the back. The jellybean shape evokes smiles, yet at the same time, it's not

too cutesy. The tan gelcoat exterior and graphics, combined with the polished tread-plate rock shield and optional aluminum wheels (\$380) give it a handsome upscale appearance.

That theme continues as you walk inside, where you are greeted by a warm, contemporary living area. Unlike many entry-level trailers, this one doesn't feel entry level; it's clear that the designers put a lot of effort not only in the floorplan but how it is decorated, floor to ceiling. The cabinets look like dark walnut, and the upholstery on the

dinette and bedspread feature contemporary earth tones for pleasing contrast. The countertops and table feature laminate surfaces, but have a pattern that mimics light granite. Even the back-splash, which is actually wall covering, was designed to look like the glass tile so popular in high-end homes today. The floor, while covered in durable vinyl, looks like brown slate that perfectly matches the rest of the interior. Energy-efficient LED lighting is used throughout.

We found the front queen pillow-top mattress (\$220) to be very comfortable, with just the right amount of firmness. A roomy wardrobe is located on either side, but unlike some trailers we've tested with a rounded front cap, the bed still has plenty of walk-around room and isn't difficult to make in the morning. There are cabinets above the bed as

well, although these are really good only for small items like socks and underwear. Reading lights are placed below the cabinet and are within reach from the supine position if you're tall; if not, you may have to sit up a little to turn them on or off.

Lift up the bottom of the bed, and you have access to both underbed and front exterior storage, which combined make for an enormous amount of space. The only problem here is that, while the bed platform is bisected, the mattress is not, and there are no struts on the platform to make lifting easier. So if you want anything from underneath the bed, you're going to need a helper to hold it up for you. Splitting the mattress or redesigning the platform with struts or a prop of some kind would make access much easier.

The galley is adequate for cooking simple meals, and the double-bowl sink comes with a cover to provide additional prep space. There is only one overhead cabinet adjacent to the convection microwave (\$310), but it is large enough for plates, cups and glasses. Likewise, there is a large cabinet underneath the stove where an oven would normally be located; this area would serve well as a pantry for canned goods and the like. There are also two drawers and another cabinet that is mostly occupied by plumbing. The upside to this is that accessing the sink's P-trap, water pump and valves is easy.

There are, however, a couple of areas here that could use some improvement. The sink fixture, with its brushed-nickel finish, looks great but feels flimsy. And the stove has no striker, so you'll want to keep matches or a lighter close at hand. The 6.3-cubic-foot Norcold refrigerator has a matching faux wood front and plenty of room for a small family's necessities.

Overall, the living space works well. The optional 24-inch flat-screen LED television with a swing-away arm (\$450) is within easy viewing from the dinette or bed

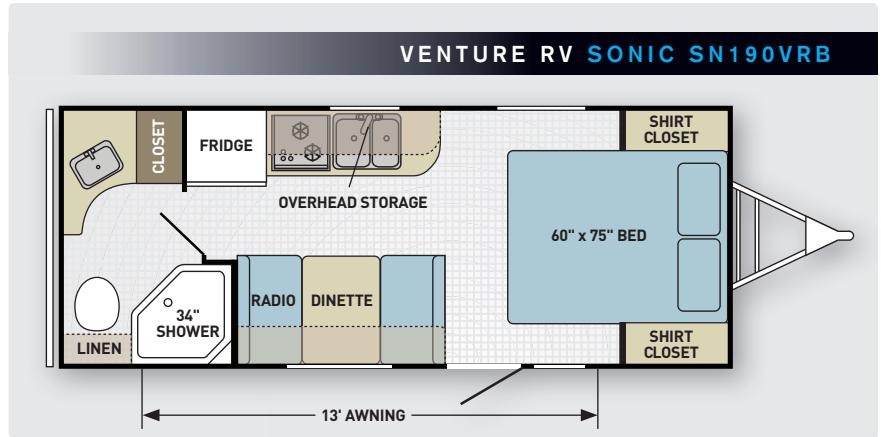


Venture did an admirable job making ordinary materials appear higher end in the Sonic. The table and countertops mimic granite, and the backsplash, which looks like glass tile, is actually wall covering. Dark wood cabinets with radius corners lend a contemporary feel, and the bed area offers plenty of storage underneath. There's additional room for clothing essentials in the wardrobes and overhead cabinets.

and has cable and satellite inputs. The radio/DVD player is located on the cabinet right next to it and is easy to use, with switches for the interior and dual exterior speakers. Additional storage can be found underneath each dinette bench, which is a nice touch.

There are some things we'd like to see added or changed. The awning and interior light controls are located underneath the cabinet to the left of the doorway; we'd like to see them on the entry wall where they are easier to see and access. The trailer has day shades only, and there is no cover for the living area skylight, so you're going to rise with the sun...whether you like it or not.

Most small trailers have commensurately small bathrooms, but that's not the case in the Sonic. The rear bathroom is huge for a trailer of this size, with a glass-door neo-angle shower that has enough room for an average-size person to move around. There's a linen closet with a shelf just behind the toilet, another wardrobe/linen closet on the street side, and the vanity has more countertop space than a lot of homes we've been to. The acrylic sink is tiny but usable, and there is plenty of storage space beneath it. There's also a medicine cabinet with a mirror, as well as switches for the water pump and water heater, which we appreciated. At the bottom of the vanity is easy access



to the water heater and related plumbing which, again, makes maintenance and repairs easy.

The trailer's cargo capacity should work well for most small families. After deducting its 3,890-pound wet weight from its 4,500-pound gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR), there are 610 pounds left for cargo, personal gear and so on. Considering most small trailers are used for short excursions, this should be plenty.

The Sonic is towable by most small pickups and SUVs. For our testing, we paired it with a 2014 Jeep Grand Cherokee that, even with the base 3.6-liter V-6, has a maximum tow rating of 6,200 pounds. The test vehicle, however, was the top-of-the-line Grand Cherokee Summit 4x4 with the new

3.0-liter EcoDiesel engine (a \$5,000 option), which has a maximum tow rating of 7,200 pounds. This is admittedly far more capacity than required, but considering that the diesel powerplant is the most significant addition to the Grand Cherokee lineup in years, we were eager to test its capabilities.

Even in its base Laredo trim level, the Grand Cherokee is a great-looking, well-equipped vehicle that offers a civilized on-road ride and surprising capabilities when the going gets rough. At the other end of the scale is the Summit, which takes a backseat to no other SUV when it comes to luxury, technology and off-road prowess. As you might expect, the sticker price reflects this: As tested, this Grand Cherokee with optional equipment came to \$57,190,



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which is quite a bump from the base Laredo's \$29,395 price. But the Summit is, quite frankly, in another league by comparison; where the base model targets competitive vehicles like the Ford Explorer and Chevy Traverse, the Summit looks to capture the hearts and minds of potential Range Rover customers. And it is equipped to do so.

The EcoDiesel engine, the same used in Ram 1500-series pickups, develops 240 horsepower at 3,600 RPM along with 420 lb-ft of torque at only 2,000 RPM. It's backed by an all-new ZF eight-speed automatic transmission that not only contributes to the EcoDiesel's impressive 21 MPG/28 MPG highway/24 MPG combined fuel economy figure, it also offers a super-low 4.714 first-gear ratio, which can really help get a trailer moving.

When equipped with the available Quadra-Trac II two-speed transfer case, the transmission also bestows the Grand Cherokee with an impressive 44.1:1 crawl ratio to help navigate challenging off-road terrain. The test Grand Cherokee upped the ante with the available Quadra-Drive II system, which also incorporates an Electronic Limited Slip differential that instantly detects tire slip and distributes engine torque to the wheels with the most traction. Opting for either transfer case will get you the Quadra-Lift air suspension system, which works in concert with the Selec-Terrain system to provide the driver with maximum control, on- or off-road.

At normal ride height, the Quadra-Lift system offers 8.7 inches of ground clearance, which is adequate for most light off-roading. Selecting the Off Road setting nets 10 inches of ground clearance, while Off Road 2 yields a maximum of 11.3 inches. Conversely, the Aero mode lowers the vehicle to 8.1 inches for better aerodynamics and fuel economy, and the Park mode lowers the vehicle even further to aid ingress and egress.

Driving off-road can present a number of challenges, and Selec-Terrain stands at the ready to help you conquer them. Selec-Terrain is a driver-selectable management system that elec-

SPECIFICATIONS

2014 JEEP GRAND CHEROKEE SUMMIT

Fuel Economy	Solo: 28 mpg Towing: 15.2 mpg
0-60 mpg, towing	16.28 sec.
40-60 towing	9.23 sec.
Engine	3.0-liter EcoDiesel V-6 turbodiesel
Horsepower	240 @ 3,600 rpm
Torque	420 lb-ft @ 2,000 rpm
Transmission	ZF 8-speed automatic
Axle ratio	3.45:1
Fuel Cap.	24.6 gal.
Tires	Goodyear 265/50R20 all-season
Suspension	Short- and long-arm independent with coil springs front, multilink with coil springs rear
Tow Rating	7,200 lbs.
GCWR	13,624 lbs.
Weight, as tested	5,320 lbs.
Length	15' 9.8"
Wheelbase	115"
MSRP, base	\$51,195
MSRP, as tested	\$57,190
Basic Warranty	3 years/36,000 miles

Jeep

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2014 VENTURE RV SONIC SN190VRB

Exterior Length	22' 10"
Exterior Width	7' 8"
Exterior Height	10' 3"
Interior Width	7' 4"
Interior Height	6' 8"
Construction	Laminated sidewalls, aluminum framing
Freshwater Cap.	39 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	24 / 31 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	6.3 cu. ft.
Furnace	20,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu
Converter	30 amp
Battery	(1) 12 volt
Tires	205/75R14
Suspension	Leaf spring
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no supplies or cargo)	3,890 lbs.
Hitch Weight	620 lbs.
Axle Weight	3,270 lbs.
GVWR	4,500 lbs.
GAWR	(2) 1,760 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	610 lbs.
Base MSRP	\$19,325
MSRP, as tested	\$22,821
Basic Warranty	1 year limited

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tronically coordinates up to 12 different powertrain, braking and suspension systems for optimum performance on a variety of surfaces. Simply turn a dial to select Sand, Snow, Mud or Rock settings, or just leave it in Auto mode and it will make the decisions for you. Not available in the test vehicle but coming soon to EcoDiesel models is the Selec-Speed Control, with Hill-Ascent and Hill-Descent controls to help the driver regulate speed on extreme grades.

The Jeep Grand Cherokee Summit is also equipped with a number of driver aids for on-road use. Among these are the ParkView rear backup camera, ParkSense front and rear park-assist system, Blind Spot and Rear Cross Path Detection, and Forward Collision Warning with Crash Mitigation. We're not huge fans of electronic nannies, and soured on the

Forward Collision Warning system in the first few days of our testing when it screeched a warning simply because the truck in front of us slowed to turn off the highway. It did more to startle us than anything else.

Adorned in Cashmere Pearl Coat exterior paint complemented by 20-inch polished wheels, the tester certainly looked elegant — and stepping inside reinforced this impression. The Jeep Grand Canyon Brown interior color scheme was pleasant to look at, with lots of bright work for added bling. The seats are heated in the first and second rows, and offer eight-way driver and passenger adjustment with four-way lumbar support. It would seem like anyone could get comfortable in them, but sadly, that wasn't the case. We found the seats to be too hard and could never get them into position where we felt like

we could drive for hours.

On our test, the EcoDiesel performed beyond our expectations. At a time when diesel engines are being systematically stripped of their characteristic clatter, the Fiat-sourced engine still had enough of that happy noise to keep us satisfied without becoming invasive at any speed. It also has that characteristic diesel rush under boost; stepping on it hard with the trailer in tow made it feel as though the A-frame might rip free of the hitch. Lacking in power this engine is not, and the transmission offers paddle shifters to help you manually select gears when towing or for more driver involvement when driving solo.

As expected, the Jeep had no trouble towing the Sonic up a 6 percent grade at 55 MPH and could easily surpass that speed if doing so were legal in California. The EcoDiesel also delivered impressive fuel economy, netting 15.2 MPG with the Sonic in tow. If you wanted the EcoDiesel engine and 4x4 without so



Jeep Grand Cherokee Summit interior is handsome and well crafted, with all controls within easy reach. Jeep Grand Canyon Brown leather matched well with the exterior color.

many electronic gizmos or the Summit's unique interior, you can get the Grand Cherokee Limited for about \$40,000, which will give you the things you really want — and, of course, you can option up from there if desired.

The Venture RV Sonic and Jeep

Grand Cherokee Summit make a handsome pair that work well together, both on the highway and off the beaten path. If out-of-the-way adventures are part of your plans, this lightweight trailer and capable SUV can get you there with confidence and style. 🚐

An advertisement for ITC lighting. The background is a collage of RV interior photos showing various lighting fixtures installed in different areas like the kitchen, living area, and reading nook. The ITC logo is in the top left corner. The main headline reads "illuminate life on the open road." Below this, there are three inset images: one showing undercabinet lighting in a kitchen, one showing a round flush-mount light fixture, and one showing a reading light in a chair. A central text box lists "Direct benefits to RV owners" with four bullet points. At the bottom left, it says "A Preferred Supplier To Original Equipment Manufacturers For Over 30 Years" with icons for "MARINE" and "RV". At the bottom right, it says "ON SALE NOW" and "For Good Sam Club members at Camping World Also available at other RV retailers".

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WALK-THROUGH: KEYSTONE ALPINE 3600RS

Reaching New Heights

Keystone's Alpine 3600RS can be ordered with feature-rich packages that add luxurious amenities and stylish looks



When you're going to be living with an RV, you want to make sure you can equip it exactly the way you want. The latest generation Alpine 3600RS by Keystone RV offers abundant standard features, plus a variety of options and packages aimed at satisfying owners of all types.

Shown here is the 3600RS, which pulls you in with modern design elements, open floor space, and a hint of nature. With dark interior colors complemented by light, faux-leather furniture and dark wood accents, this trailer looks and feels like it will live up to its upscale status in the Keystone lineup.

Standing in the doorway, the first things you see are stairs and a decorative metal banister that lead into the master bedroom. On the right-hand wall by the front door, there's a convenient closet. Look left, and there's a wide-open kitchen with an oversize island supporting a good work space, a

contoured stainless-steel double sink and a matching soap dispenser within arm's reach. Just behind the island is a three-burner stove with a gorgeous dark and light contrasting backsplash. This arrangement is complementary to the kitchen's overall design.

The dinette, located in the curbside slideout, has a beautiful table and four-chair combination, complete with straps to secure the chairs for safe travel. With plenty of space to store food, the Dutch pantry and its oversize drawers make traveling with large amounts of groceries and cookware easy and user friendly.

In the rear living room is an entertainment system that holds a hidden pull-out desk, two recliners, a ceiling fan and 80 percent tinted safety windows. Occupants will also enjoy the stone-look fireplace and pop-up 40-inch LED TV. The couch on the rear wall converts into a bed for two, and the living area can easily handle the

additional guests without crowding.

At the opposite end of the trailer is the master bedroom and bathroom area, with a king-size bed perched in the streetside slideout. The large bed prevents the use of two nightstands — the only one is positioned on the left side of the bed. Water and drain and vent hookups in the closet make this storage space suitable for a washer and dryer, which is always appreciated when spending longer periods of time on the road. The front bedroom offers a home-away-from-home feel that provides welcome space and good headroom.

The bathroom is accessible from the bedroom or off the stairway from the lower portion of the trailer and features a neo-angle shower and porcelain toilet. Located above the single-space counter and sink is a mirrored medicine cabinet.

Of course, there's more to a good quality trailer than just the interior



Free-flowing graphics and aluminum wheels contrast with a front cap designed for sharper turning with short-bed trucks.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER

WALK-THROUGH: KEYSTONE ALPINE 3600RS

features. This trailer's body rests on a powder-coated I-beam chassis that can be equipped with a six-point hydraulic leveling system. Hydraulic selector valves for the slideouts give the user flexibility for leveling and stabilizing while allowing for independent control of the slideouts. The front jacks have 8-inch all-terrain landing pads, allowing this fifth-wheel to park almost anywhere. Also included is a 50-amp detachable power cord conveniently rolled up on a retractable reel.

The exterior fiberglass has a high-gloss finish, complemented by stylish aluminum wheels and radial tires. Below the 6-foot 4-inch entry door are four easy steps with recessed rope lighting. The unit includes a one-piece polypropylene underbelly, and Keystone applied triple-insulated and heated holding tanks as well. Exterior gutters with rainspouts are located at the ends of the railing above the one-touch electric awning with adjustable arms.

Located on the front cap, which is designed for sharper turning, are the Hitch Assist backup mirror and lights. Located on the end cap is a ladder for roof access. In the

The wide-open kitchen features an oversize island fitted with double stainless-steel sinks and a designer faucet. The range and oven are set in a matching counter with a dark- and light-colored backsplash. A four-door refrigerator is positioned between the stove and entertainment center. (Previous page) The fireplace and large TV are directly across from two recliners for comfortable viewing.



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Weber Q™ 1000 (Mfr. #50060001)

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Cast aluminum lid and body



Cart is 25" H x 29" W x 20" D when open

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- Cover for Q® 2000 & 2200 Models (Mfr. #6551)



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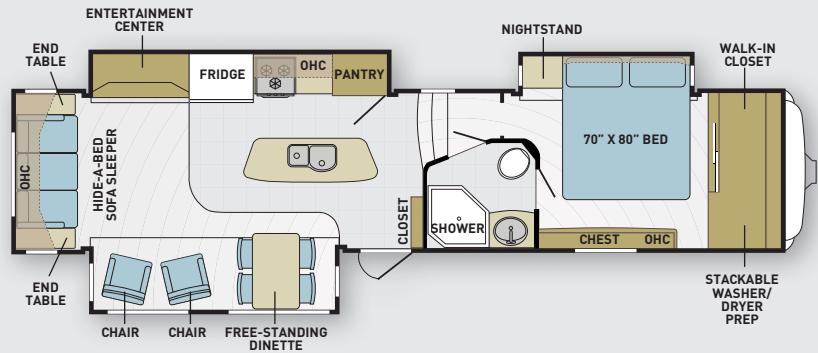
QUICK INFO

exterior side walls are storage compartments with huge Class A motor-home-style dual slam-latch doors that allow easy access. Completing the organized theme are the well-arranged plumbing valves, water fills and accessories, such as the outside shower.

As mentioned earlier, the 3600RS can be ordered with a number of option packages such as Peaks, Alps, Chateau and Super Cinema, not to mention a variety of standalone options like a central vacuum system, generator prep and full-body paint. This enables owners to outfit the trailer according to their own needs and budget.

This fifth-wheel ships at 12,228 pounds, which allows for a carrying capacity of 3,272 pounds to handle water and propane, plus plenty of supplies.

Targeted at full-timers and those looking for more space when vacationing and entertaining, Keystone's Alpine 3600RS is classy and easygoing. It's well thought out for RVers looking for a fifth-wheel with luxury features. 



Exterior Length	39' 0"	Gray-water Cap.	82 gal.
Exterior Width	8' 4"	LP-gas Cap.	14 gal.
Interior Height	8' 4"	UVW	12,228 lbs.
Exterior Height	12' 8"	Hitch Weight	2,240 lbs.
Freshwater Cap.	66 gal.	GVWR	15,500 lbs.
Black-water Cap.	50 gal.	MSRP, base	\$65,400

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BOOSTING Cell Signals

SmoothTalker's wireless and direct-connect radio-frequency amplifiers improve phone and data service, especially in fringe areas

by Bob Livingston



There's no denying that staying connected is an important factor when picking places to visit in your RV. Many times, RV parks are chosen because of Wi-Fi availability and the ability to receive a strong signal for smartphones, tablets and laptops. But in reality, searching for signal "bars" and using electronic devices in areas off the beaten path can be irritating — especially for the tech geeks out there. This becomes even more painful when trying to conduct business while on the road. SmoothTalker, a Canadian company specializing in mobile communications, offers solutions to RVers looking for independence from weak — or overloaded — Wi-Fi in campgrounds and weak cell service in fringe areas.

The company manufactures and markets Federal

Communications Commission (FCC) and Industry Canada approved boosters — radio frequency (RF) amplifiers — that not only improve incoming and outgoing cell signals but give users a platform for setting up a personal wireless system inside and within a certain distance outside of their RVs. What started many years ago as boosters that plugged into flip phones has evolved into sophisticated wireless equipment that improves signal strength for all cellphones, tablets and data devices. The booster operates in 800 and 1,900 megahertz (MHz) bands, which are used by the majority of cellular carriers. The user has no control of bands, and carriers commonly flip back and forth when providing service.

Historically, the 800-MHz band is more prevalent in remote areas because that's the band carriers were originally licensed to use when the cellphone industry was launched. Consequently, there are more 800-MHz towers in remote areas because those are the ones that were put up first, but more importantly the 800-MHz band is deployed wherever possible because lower frequency signals have lower path loss and travel farther than higher frequency signals. As a general rule, the more remote the location, the higher likelihood that the only cell signal will be in the 800-MHz cellular band.

SmoothTalker's BRM220-50 is its top-of-the-line wireless



Booster kit includes AC and DC power supplies, mounting brackets and indoor antenna.

vehicle signal booster, designed to provide the highest gain permitted for mobile boosters within FCC guidelines. As of April 30, 2014, the FCC has mandated that mobile booster gain be limited to 50 decibels (dB), which still makes a huge difference in remote areas. All received and transmitted cellular signals are measured in dB, which is a whole science unto itself.

For example, the received signal strength indicator (RSSI) that relates to the number of bars on the device, depending on the available service at the time, might be minus 105 dB in a fringe area. That's marginal for texting and voice, and forget about data service. Boost the signal using the Smooth-Talker's amplifier by 50 dB, and the RSSI will improve from 5 to 25 dB, depending on the distance from the booster antenna. This level of improvement will give the user dramatically better voice, text and data service.

Don't get too wrapped up in RSSI and decibels; just about everyone deals only with the number of bars. In bar language for most phones, five bars is equivalent to approximately minus 75 dB; subtract 7 dB for each bar loss on the screen.

To test the effectiveness of the SmoothTalker booster, we set up the system in a 40-foot RV. Installation is relatively easy, but antenna placement is critical for optimum performance. Two antennas are connected to the booster, one inside and one outside. There are a few outside antenna



choices, but for an RV, using a small whip antenna mounted to the roof makes the most sense. There are two choices here: a 2-inch stubby whip or one that is 14 inches tall. For most RV travel, the 2-inch is the most effective.

Mounting options include a magnetic base for "sticking" to metal surfaces or using an optional adjustable bracket for mounting on windows, side walls, ladders or roof racks. Routing the coaxial cable requires some preplanning, but going through the refrigerator vent usually works best, if you don't want to drill holes in the roof or wall.

A slim inside antenna provided with the kit has an unusual shape that makes it capable of being hung



Outside antennas are available with a 14- or 2-inch whip on a magnetic base.

on a cabinet door or taped to the wall (two-sided tape included). The key to placement is keeping the separation between the inside and outside antennas far enough so the booster's green lights don't flash, about 15 to 20 feet. You'll also want to position the inside antenna close to the cell device. That's because any wireless system is subject to free air loss. Signal to the phone is reduced as the separation between the cellular device and interior antenna increases. For example, there will be a 25- to 30-dB loss when a cellphone is at a distance of 3 feet from the inside antenna.

Also, if the inside and outside antennas are too close, the level of boost



(Above from left) Users who choose not to hardwire the booster to a 12-volt DC source can use an optional power supply that plugs into an accessory port. A clever bracket is designed to facilitate antenna mounting to a rear ladder or even the side wall of the RV. The inside antenna can be clamped to the edge of a cabinet door or taped to any flat surface near the phone or data device.

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SmoothTalker's wideband high-gain directional antenna improves service in fringe areas and can be used inside RVs that are too short for optimum separation from the outside antenna.

is impacted, much like feedback in a sound system when the microphone is too close to the speaker. If there's feedback, the gain (think volume control in the speaker analogy) must be turned down; the booster does this automatically.

Performance can be upgraded by using SmoothTalker's wideband high-gain directional antenna inside the

RV, in concert with the outdoor whip antenna. This antenna can be mounted in a number of ways using the provided bracket or simply placed on a counter. This is a pretty versatile antenna because it can also be used as a directional outside antenna when parked in remote areas where the signal is very weak. In this situation, the antenna

800 MHz TEST

	BOOSTER	BOOSTER	BOOSTER	NO BOOSTER
Distance from inside antenna	8"	3'	10"	
Phone RX signal (RSSI)	-47 dB	-69 dB	-76 dB	-87dB

1,900 MHz TEST

	BOOSTER	BOOSTER	BOOSTER	NO BOOSTER
Distance from inside antenna	8"	3'	10'	
Phone RX signal (RSSI)	-72 dB	-86 dB	-89 dB	-93 dB

DATA SPEED TEST

	PING	DOWNLOAD	UPLOAD
With booster	296 ms	4.19 Mbps	.91 Mbps
Without booster	347 ms	.33 Mbps	.42 Mbps

can be attached to the rear ladder or mounted on a pole at the campsite and aimed at the carrier's tower.

Another use of the wideband antenna is inside a smaller RV. If the separation distance between the antennas is limited by RV length, the wideband antenna can be placed on a counter or table (using the bracket in a pedestal configuration) with its back to the outside antenna. The bottom line: Users can experiment with multiple combinations of antenna placements, depending on the RV and available space.

For the evaluation, the amplifier was powered by the 12-volt DC accessory adapter/plug that comes with the system. The amplifier can be hardwired to the RV's 12-volt DC system, but the device runs on 6-volt DC, so the supplied power adapter must be used; direct wiring to 12-volt DC will fry the unit. There's also an AC/DC power supply for connecting to standard 120-volt AC outlets.

We separated the inside and outside antennas by 16 feet. There was zero

oscillation, meaning the booster did not turn its gain down during the test. Gain is indicated by the green LEDs in the booster — a solid green light confirms that the boosted signal is at maximum gain. If the green light flashes, there's a reduction in gain. Each flash of the green LED indicates a gain reduction of 3 dB. A second, orange LED will remain solid-on if the band is functioning normally.

The tests using a smartphone showed dramatic improvement in phone signal. Of course, signal was best when the phone was closer to the inside antenna (see chart on page 72).

We also performed a data test to measure differences in download and upload speeds with and without the booster. Testing the effectiveness of the booster in a data-only session is tricky because the carrier uses multiple towers and frequency bands to provide the fastest data speeds and control traffic on its spectrum. To simulate the situation found in most remote sites with coverage from only one cell

tower, a call is placed on the cellphone while the speed test is performed. The call ensured that the phone was being served by only one tower on one frequency during the test. Clearly, the results show that data speed was much faster with the use of the booster (page 72).

There are two other options for those who don't need the wireless capabilities and want to save a few bucks. The BST220-23 booster kit uses a cradle that holds the phone or cellular device and connects to the booster. Phone-specific cradle kits are available for many popular phones, and there is a universal cradle kit that can be used for all cellphones and mobile hotspot devices.

An outside antenna is connected to the booster in the same manner as the wireless version. The cradle is then connected to the phone side of the booster, and the phone/hotspot device is placed in the cradle. The cradle is designed to plug into a 12-volt DC accessory port (cigarette lighter), providing charging capability for the

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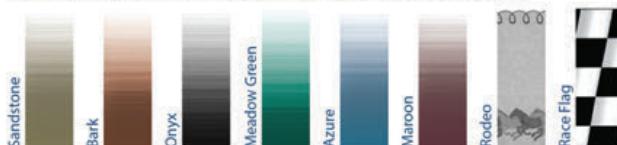
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Dometic

phone or other device. Power for the booster comes from the same sources as its wireless counterpart.

We tested the BST220-23 with a cellphone on the 800-MHz band. Signal without the booster was recorded at minus 88 dB. Connected to the booster, gain improved to minus 61 dB. Using the connected amplifier in remote regions will greatly improve signal strength because it's not subject to free air losses, but, of course, the wireless capability is lost. A Bluetooth headset, wired earbuds or the speaker will have to be used when making calls while the phone is in the cradle.

The least expensive option is the BST220-15, a 15-dB-gain booster that is designed for use with any data device that has an antenna port built in (laptop data cards and cellular modems). The booster is connected with a cable that plugs directly into the cellular device's antenna port. The external antenna connection is the same as the other boosters described earlier. We did not



Phone-specific and universal cradles are used with the connected booster. The one on the right plugs into a 12-volt DC accessory port, which doubles as the cradle support.

test this booster.

Let's face it, there are two types of users of cellular services: those who are addicted to their smartphones, tablets and computers, and those who must stay connected by necessity. There's nothing more frustrating than traveling in areas with marginal signals, and for a small investment you can keep most of

those happy signal bars on the screen.

SmoothTalker's wireless BRM220-50 booster kits start at \$399.99, the coupling BST220-23 kits start at \$259.99, and the direct-connect BST220-15 kits start at \$199.99. 📶

SmoothTalker

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Good Sam Highways



What's Up in Oshkosh?

Join Good Sam in Wisconsin this summer
for a high-flying air show ▶ See page IX

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II Good Sam Forums

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X Action Line

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XII Pet Tales



Good Sam Community

More than discounts, services and information, the Good Sam Club represents community. Forty-eight years after the club got its start, the Good Sam community is still bringing RVers together in fun and exciting ways. Whether it's the growing Good Sam Facebook community, regional chapters, Samborees or Good Sam events, RVers are sharing their journeys and making new friends along the way.

With 2014 in full swing, members can find countless opportunities to connect with other members. We've already staged more than 30 Good Sam events and Samborees across North America this year and still have more than 50 planned. And the Good Sam calendar continues to grow with this summer's AirVenture Experience and fall's Norsk Høstfest Scandinavian festival.

Nothing exemplifies the Good Sam spirit and community like Good Sam chapters. I'd like to acknowledge the 195 chapters celebrating 40-plus years in 2014 and congratulate our 39th annual Chapter of the Year, Florida's Trail Blazing Sams, along with the three honorable mentions: Michigan's Double Nickel Sams, West Virginia's Traveling Renegades and the Utah Deer Sams.

The Good Sam community continues to grow on the Good Sam Facebook page where members mingle with fellow RVers and share stories and photos on travel destinations. Whether online, by joining a chapter or attending

a Samboree or regional Good Sam event, I hope you're experiencing the club's vibrant and growing community.

Look for the next *Highways* inside the September issue of *Trailer Life* or *MotorHome*. Until then, please email your feedback to me at marcusvip@goodsamfamily.com.

Happy travels,

Marcus Lemonis

Chairman and CEO
Good Sam Enterprises and Camping World

Contact the Good Sam Club

Good Sam Club

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P.O. Box 6888, Englewood, Colorado 80112-5114
info@goodsamclub.com

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From the Good Sam Forums

WHAT'S YOUR RV'S NAME?

Like any good vessel, your RV must be named! Ours is Summerhouse, because in the summer months it's our house at the lake, in the mountains and up north. So what did you name yours?

Ginnifh, Texas

The Short Bus. It's a 28-foot Class A.
Workhardplayharder, Florida

My husband named our fiver Wife's Palatial Palace, because we bought the one I wanted. He named our dually truck Fluffy Bunny because it's white and is chased by a Fox!

Impkitti, Washington

Our Class A Phaeton is Phaeton Place. Our B+ is MinnieMee.
Scottiemom, South Dakota/Indiana

☞ To join the online conversation, go to forums.goodsamclub.com

Her name is Chaumière (pronounced *Say-show-me-air*), a French word for cottage.

Matt Colie, Michigan

Ndeke Luka, Sango for Freebird.
DiploStrat, Virginia

Home!
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Member News

SECOND TO NONE

GOOD SAM'S 2013 CHAPTER OF THE YEAR GOES ABOVE AND BEYOND



Ⓜ Cream of the crop: Florida's Trail Blazing Sams

Bringing RVers together is what Good Sam's regional chapters are all about. At monthly campouts chapter members circle their RVs to share good times and do good deeds. Each year a few truly inspiring chapters stand out for their Good Samaritan spirit, and the club recognizes them with Chapter of the Year nominations. This spring four chapters received nominations for their outstanding public service in 2013, and in April Good Sam members cast their votes online. With the votes now counted, we're pleased to announce that our 39th annual Chapter of the Year is Florida's Trail Blazing Sams. The Good Sam Club applauds the winning chapter and the three honorable mentions.

CHAPTER OF THE YEAR WINNER

Trail Blazing Sams, Florida

The 23 families of the Trail Blazing Sams give their all to make central Florida a better place. As part of the Adopt-a-Road program, they've kept South Mobley Road litter-free since 2005. Over the years they've contributed \$18,000 in aluminum pull-tabs to Shriners Hospitals for Children, including 71 pounds' worth last year. Members crocheted baby hats and blankets for infants and new mothers in 2013 and brightened the lives of seniors and veterans with hand-knit shawls, lap robes and afghans. To raise money for charities ranging from Dogs for the Deaf to the Wounded Warrior Project, they sold bottled water, hot chocolate and flea market items at Florida Samborees. Other recipients of the chapter's largesse include the Citrus County Abuse Shelter and the Hillsborough Education Foundation. Spreading the Good Samaritan spirit to tens of thousands of RV enthusiasts at the Florida RV SuperShow, members volunteered 500 hours serving refreshments and handing out door prizes.

CHAPTER OF THE YEAR HONORABLE MENTIONS

Double Nickel Sams, Michigan

Michigan's chapter 55, the Double Nickel Sams, launched in 1982 with a pledge to give back to the greater Grand Rapids community. Thirty-two years later, 21 member families continue to do just that. Last year they spruced up Pine Ridge Bible Camp, raised money for Paws with a Cause and hand-packed meals for Feed My Starving Children. At the holidays, members donated to the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans.

Traveling Renegades, West Virginia

The 34 members of the Traveling Renegades do good deeds in their corner of Appalachia every month of the year, starting with a January donation to the West Virginia Veterans Nursing Facility and wrapping up 2013 with a gift to the Wounded Warrior Project. They also donated to two dog shelters, the West Virginia Wildlife Center, the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life and Mission Heart Hug.

Utah Deer Sams, Utah

In 2013 the Utah Deer Sams logged 13,659 community service hours and performed innumerable acts of kindness throughout Wasatch and Utah Counties. Each year members lend a hand at Heber City's Special Olympics Rodeo and go all out on Good Sam Cleanup Days, tidying up Camp Floyd State Park last year. The Deer Sams raised \$655 for Dogs for the Deaf, making them Utah's top contributing chapter in 2013.



46 YEARS OF GOOD SAM CHAPTERS

Back in 1968, Good Sam launched its first local chapters, bringing members together for RV fun and philanthropy. Times have changed in the intervening 46 years, but Good Sam chapters are still going strong. This year 195 chapters celebrate anniversaries of 40 years or more, including the club's original chapter, Utah's Ute Salt Shakers. To join a chapter in your area or start a new one, visit goodsamclub.com/chapters.

Ⓜ Ute Salt Shakers: Shaking things up since 1968.

Customer Appreciation Days



Camping World is spreading the love this summer at Customer Appreciation Days, July 10 through 13 and July 17 through 20, at SuperCenters across America. Take advantage of event-only savings and spin the prize wheel for a chance to save even more. Enjoy free coffee and doughnuts as you shop on Fridays and Saturdays, and make sure to enter for a chance to win a \$250 Camping World shopping spree. To find a Camping World SuperCenter near you, visit CampingWorld.com/stores.



Now Open

- Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
- Saukville, Wisconsin (Milwaukee area)

Opening Soon

- Mid-June: Olive Branch, Mississippi (Memphis area)
- Mid-July: Rossford, Ohio (Toledo area)

MAKE A DIFFERENCE AT CAMPING WORLD

Good Sam members can make the world a better place this summer with Camping World and The NASCAR Foundation. When you visit a Camping World SuperCenter between June 1 and July 31, consider donating \$5 to The NASCAR Foundation, and you'll receive the nonprofit organization's 2014 collectible lapel pin. This fundraising effort helps the foundation provide educational opportunities that turn kids into winners. For more information, visit nascarfoundation.org/camping-world.



FORGING A FAMILY BUSINESS

Williamsburg, Virginia's Anvil Campground was a soybean field back in 1954 when a man asked the owner if he could park his truck on the property for the night. That incident planted the seed of an idea in the mind of Grandpa Jump, and by the end of the year he had six campsites. As blacksmiths for Colonial Williamsburg, Jump and his father knew a thing or two about striking while the iron is hot. Today their descendants run the aptly named Anvil Campground, now celebrating its 60th year. The 9.5/9.5*/8.5-rated campground is one of more than 2,100 Good Sam Parks that offer members a 10 percent discount on nightly stays. goodsamclub.com/travel



RVER OF THE YEAR: WHO'S NEXT?

This year the Good Sam Club has been honoring our sixth-annual RVers of the Year, Georgia members Joan and Frank Anderson, for a lifetime of volunteer service including founding a Project Linus chapter and spearheading numerous Lions Club projects. Now it's time to nominate a new slate of RVer of the Year candidates. If you know an RVing Good Sam member or couple who, like the Andersons, devotes their time to supporting good causes, please take a moment to nominate them for the 2014 RVer of the Year award at goodsamclub.com/rveroftheyear.

👉 Reigning RVers of the Year Frank and Joan Anderson.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN

There's something for everyone at a Samboree

Never been to a Good Sam Samboree? You're missing out on part of the fun of your Good Sam Club membership. These state and provincial gatherings bring together Good Sam members in one spot for a few days to meet old friends and make new ones while sharing RV tips, playing games and spreading the Good Samaritan spirit. Not surprisingly, the first two Samborees of 2014 took place in the Sunbelt, in Arizona and Nevada.

Arizona's four-day Samboree drew nearly 250 members to the Yuma County Fairgrounds the first week of March. After breaking the ice at a wine and cheese social, members and their pets dressed in their Halloween best for fun and prizes. If you're wondering why Halloween in March, the Samboree's theme was Trick or Treat. During the day, members socialized some more and played beanbag baseball, then gathered in the evening to listen to country singer Duke Michaels and other entertainers. But it wasn't all fun and games. Samboree-goers filled 10 large boxes with canned goods, pasta, cereal and other nonperishable items for the Yuma Community Food Bank and awarded a couple of \$500 scholarships to college-bound students.

The following week, 97 RVs rolled in to Nevada Treasure RV Resort in Pahrump for four days of fun in the Southwest sun. After dusting off their sombreros for the Fiesta Time theme, each Good Sam chapter in attendance served up two bowls of homemade salsa to raise money for the state's charitable-giving fund. Nevada Samboree-goers purchased tortilla chips, then made the salsa-tasting rounds before voting on the winner. Later, they pulled out their camp chairs for the requisite beanbag baseball tournament and likewise gathered for cards and board games, bocce ball and horseshoes. They mingled at the ice cream social, showed off their talents at the arts and crafts competition, marched their dogs in the pet parade and dined in style at the Saturday night dinner and sausage and pancake breakfast.

To find out when there's a Samboree in your part of the world, turn to page VIII or visit goodsamclub.com/samborees.

📍 **March madness: Beanbag baseball in Pahrump.**



CAMP CUISINE

TOMATO BASIL PASTA WITH ITALIAN SAUSAGE

Ingredients

- 1 pound Italian sausage links (sweet preferred)
- 1 15-ounce can diced tomatoes
- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 12 ounces linguini
- 1 large sweet onion, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped
- ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 2 teaspoons oregano
- 2 large sprigs basil, chopped
- 2 tablespoon Parmesan cheese

Instructions

Cut the sausage into bite-size pieces. Line a microwave-safe dish with paper towels and microwave the sausage until cooked. (If you prefer, you can grill the sausage.) Set cooked sausage aside. Put all remaining ingredients, including pasta, in a stockpot — don't worry, it won't turn to mush. Bring to a boil, then simmer for 10 minutes. Reduce liquid to about 1 inch in the bottom of the pot. Add the cooked sausage. Serve immediately with garlic bread. Serves six.

Hail to the Chef

Nancy Iddins, a longtime member of North Carolina's Mountaineer Sams chapter, contributed this RV-friendly recipe. If you have a favorite recipe you'd like to share, email it to highways@goodsamclub.com.



NEW WAYS TO SAVE IN 2014

Good Sam discounts at Camping World and Pilot Flying J



LP-GAS DISCOUNTS

Exclusively for 2014, Good Sam Club members save 25 percent on LP-gas every Tuesday and Wednesday at Camping World SuperCenters. There's a 40-gallon limit, and the discount is off the regular retail price. LP-gas is available at most Camping World SuperCenters across the United States. To find a participating location near you, go to CampingWorld.com/stores.



INSTALLATION DISCOUNTS

With this year's exclusive \$39 installation deal, members can save hundreds of dollars on installation of popular products purchased at Camping World, from RV awnings to fifth-wheel hitches. Plus, Camping World will beat any competitor's installed price, and every installation is backed by the retailer's workmanship guarantee. For details, go to CampingWorld.com/39install.



INSTANT FUEL DISCOUNTS

Members get discounts on gas and diesel right at the pump at select Pilot and Flying J locations with the new Good Sam Swipe & Save membership card. Members receive the card when they renew their Good Sam membership. Life and Elite members can call 800-234-3450 to request the new card. For details and to find out how to save even more, visit goodsamclub.com/pfj.



HOT OFF THE PRESS SUBSCRIPTIONS AND APPS

As a Good Sam member, you're not only entitled to four free issues of *Trailer Life* or *MotorHome*, you can get monthly issues at a discounted membership rate of \$11.97. Go to trailerlife.com/goodsamclub or motorhome.com/goodsamclub or call 800-508-9755 to subscribe.

Did you also know you have two choices for reading issues online?

- 1 To view the Good Sam digital editions in your web browser, go to goodsamclub.com/highways and click on View Digital Edition for either *Trailer Life* or *MotorHome*.
- 2 To view the Good Sam digital editions on your Android, Apple or Kindle device, download your choice of two free mobile apps, *Trailer Life Mag* or *MotorHome Mag*. Then click on the Member Access button, enter your membership number and last name, click the X on the top right and open the desired issue.



MORE WAYS TO SAVE

With 1.5 million members, the Good Sam Club can negotiate great deals with great companies. Visit goodsamclub.com/save to see the full list of Smile & Save partners.

Hertz: Save on daily vehicle rentals with Hertz, the number one car-rental brand in the United States. To get your Good Sam member discount, reserve a car, van, SUV or pickup truck online at hertz.com or any Hertz rental location and mention Hertz CDP number 1561250.

Sam's Club: Receive a \$25 Sam's Club gift card when you join or renew as a Sam's Club Plus member or get a \$10 Sam's Club gift card when you join or renew as a Sam's Club Business member. Just go to goodsamclub.com/save and print the required certificate.

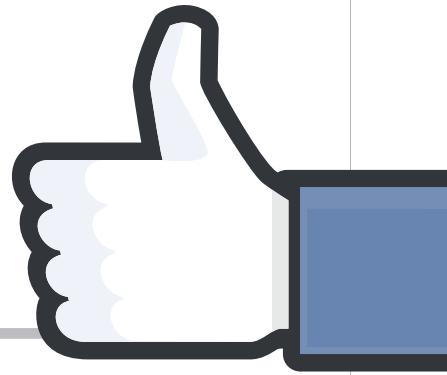
Sprint: Save 10 percent off select regularly priced communication-service plans when you sign a new two-year agreement. To redeem this offer, go to sprint.com/goodsamclub, call 800-722-9336 or visit a Sprint store and use discount code MAFGH_ZMB_ZZZ.

1800Flowers: Save 20 percent* when ordering flowers and gift baskets at 1800flowers.com and 1800baskets.com using discount code GOODSAM. Put smiles on the faces of friends and loved ones with colorful floral arrangements and other thoughtful gifts.

*Prices and discounts are exclusive of applicable service and shipping charges and taxes. Items may vary and are subject to availability, delivery rules and times. Offers are available online, by fax and by phone. Offers cannot be combined, are not available on all products and are subject to restrictions, limitations and blackout periods. Prices and charges are subject to change without notice. Offer valid through December 31, 2014. Void where prohibited. © 2014 1-800-Flowers.com, Inc. 1-800-Flowers.com uses Secure Socket Layer (SSL) encryption technology to secure its website.

Join Good Sam's Online Community

Connect with the club, members and RVers on Facebook



You're invited to an RV party that never ends on the Good Sam Club's Facebook page. Head over to facebook.com/thegoodsamclub to browse the timeline, mingle with fellow RVers and share your insights on RV camping and campgrounds. You can also get the latest club information, money-saving tips and RV park advice, and read compelling stories about travel destinations and RV road trips.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO ON THE GOOD SAM CLUB'S FACEBOOK PAGE?

JOIN THE CONVERSATION. Every day the Good Sam administrator posts questions such as, "What criteria do you use for locating your next destination?" It's a great way to learn from others and share your RV know-how.

SHARE PHOTOS. Did you snap a beautiful sunset at a Good Sam Park? Don't keep it to yourself. Post it for others to enjoy, then surf for photos

from others. You might even find your next destination that way.

SEARCH FOR RV PARKS. The Find a Campground button near the top of the page connects to Good Sam's campground search tool. Look for RV resorts and campgrounds, including Good Sam Parks, based on park name, city, state or province.

SUBSCRIBE TO CYBERSAM. Click on the eNewsletter button near the top to sign up for *CyberSam*, the Good Sam Club's monthly e-newsletter

that's filled with articles to enhance your RV lifestyle.

GET INSPIRED. Check for posts that link to travel resources. For instance, the Trips of a Lifetime links take you to inspiring travel itineraries based on great regional cuisine, stunning scenery, outdoor adventures and historic locations.

SAVE MONEY. Good Sam posts the latest Camping World deals and links for ordering online and getting to the nearest Camping World location. You'll also find information about programs like Good Sam Roadside Assistance and TravelAssist.

SHARE WITH FRIENDS. See a Good Sam post you'd like to show to friends? Click the Share link or post it on your timeline.

If you haven't joined Facebook yet, the Good Sam page is a great reason to get started. All you need is an email address and an eagerness to learn. Facebook will walk you through the easy steps to get started.

You'll always be in the company of friends on Good Sam's Facebook page. Learn more at facebook.com and don't forget to click the Like button on the Good Sam page.



STAY CONNECTED

Good Sam's Facebook page recently welcomed its 100,000th fan. If you aren't among them, click the Like button on facebook.com/thegoodsamclub.

Samborees

JULY

PENNSYLVANIA • July 4–6

Grange Fairgrounds, Centre Hall
717-816-0203, pagoodsam.com

MONTANA • July 9–13

Butte Civic Center, Butte
406-549-4911

OHIO • July 10–13

Auglaize County Fairgrounds,
Wapakoneta
740-891-8895, ohiogoodsam.com

NEW YORK • July 11–13

Herkimer County Fairgrounds,
Frankfort
315-894-3907, newyorkgoodsam.com

ATLANTIC CANADA • July 18–20

Centre Expo-Festival, Abram Village
Prince Edward Island
902-678-4230, atlantic-gs.webs.com

AUGUST

ONTARIO • August 1–3

Drayton Fairgrounds, Drayton
613-858-2009, ontariogoodsamsrvclub.com

VERMONT • August 8–10

Tunbridge Fairgrounds, Tunbridge
802-457-3742, vermontgoodsam.com

MINNESOTA • August 14–17

St. Louis County Fairgrounds,
Chisholm
320-523-2371, mngoodsamclub.com

NEW HAMPSHIRE • August 15–17

North Haverhill Fairgrounds,
North Haverhill
603-632-4908, nhgoodsam.com

NORTH DAKOTA • August 21–24

Pierce County Fairgrounds, Rugby
701-426-7123

ILLINOIS • August 29–September 1

Marshall-Putnam Fairgrounds, Henry
815-866-2452, illinoisgoodsam.org

SEPTEMBER

DELAWARE • September 5–7

Harrington State Fair Complex,
Harrington
302-537-5984, degoodsam.com

MAINE • September 5–7

Fryeburg Fairgrounds, Fryeburg,
207-651-3133, mainegoodsams.org

PENNSYLVANIA • September 9–14

Lebanon Expo Center, Lebanon
717-816-0203, pagoodsam.com

GEORGIA • September 11–14

Georgia National Fairgrounds, Perry
478-737-9764, georgiagoodsam.com

WEST VIRGINIA • September 12–14

Wetzel County Fairgrounds,
New Martinsville
304-482-7568, wvgoodsams.com

NEW MEXICO • September 16–21

Red Rock Park, Church Park
505-254-2299, nmgoodsam.com

COLORADO • September 18–21

Pueblo State Fairgrounds, Pueblo
303-646-1137, coloradogoodsam.org

MICHIGAN • September 18–21

Allegan County Fairgrounds, Allegan
616-990-5010, michigangoodsam.org

OHIO • September 19–21

Marion County Fairgrounds, Marion
740-891-8895, ohiogoodsam.com

QUEBEC • September 19–21

Camping Alouette, St-Mathieu-de-
Beloeil, 613-874-2627

NEVADA • September 22–27

Humboldt County Fairgrounds,
Winnemucca
702-274-7719, nevadagoodsam.com

NORTH CAROLINA • September 22–28

Forest Lake RV Resort, Advance
704-322-6254, ncstategoodsam.com

INDIANA • September 25–28

Miami County 4-H Fairgrounds, Peru
812-662-4057, indianagoodsam.com

MISSOURI • September 25–28

Missouri State Fairgrounds, Sedalia
314-574-4565, missourigoodsamclub.com

VIRGINIA • September 26–28

Rockahock Campground, Lanexa
703-754-4774, vagooodsam.com

OCTOBER

KANSAS • October 2–5

Kansas State Fairgrounds, Hutchinson
316-213-8297, kansasgoodsams.org

KENTUCKY • October 2–5

Madison County Fairgrounds, Richmond
502-475-3326, kentuckygoodsam.com

SOUTH CAROLINA • October 2–5

Ocean Lakes Campground,
Myrtle Beach
864-294-1977, scgoodsam.org

OKLAHOMA • October 9–12

Heart of Oklahoma Expo Center,
Shawnee
405-615-4018, oklahomagoodsams.com

NEW JERSEY • October 10–12

Chestnut Lake RV Resort, Port Republic
732-636-3715

MISSISSIPPI • October 16–19

Southwest Event Center, Tylertown
601-829-1883, msgoodsam.org

MARYLAND • October 17–19

Event Plex Frederick Fairgrounds,
Frederick
240-778-4455, mdgoodsam.org

TENNESSEE • October 30–November 2

River Plantation RV Park, Sevierville
423-240-4391, tngoodsam.com

NOVEMBER

FLORIDA • November 19–23

Southern Palms RV Resort, Eustis
407-417-7559, goodsams-florida.org

MORE EVENTS

Find the full schedule of Good Sam Samborees at goodsamclub.com/samborees and regional activities and Good Sam events at goodsamclub.com/events.





Meet Us in the Midwest

Two Good Sam get-togethers in America's heartland

Sambores aren't the only big events bringing together Good Sam members this year. From North America's largest Scandinavian festival to the world's largest air show of its kind, the Good Sam Club is huddling up at some high-profile events in 2014. Here's a look at two of the biggest.

EAA AIRVENTURE OSHKOSH

For aviation enthusiasts, attending Wisconsin's EAA AirVenture Oshkosh is a rite of passage. For the rest of us, it's a summer spectacle that's not to be missed. Held July 28 through August 3 this year, the high-flying event transforms the small town of Oshkosh into a weeklong metropolis, attracting half a million spectators and making Wittman Regional Airport the busiest in the world.

EAA stands for Experimental Aircraft Association, and AirVenture showcases a vast fleet of one-of-a-kind planes among the more than 10,000 aircraft on display. Sensational aerobatics, daring wing-walkers and skydiving teams provide daily thrills, and two after-dark shows paint the night sky with pyrotechnics.

This year the Good Sam Club joins the thousands of RVers at Camp Scholler, the best place to experience this bucket-list event, with easy access to all the activities, free Wi-Fi, food concessions and general stores. EAA is offering a special \$10 six-month

membership (the standard annual fee is \$40), entitling Good Sam members to purchase AirVenture admission at discounted EAA rates and stay at Camp Scholler. To find out more, visit goodsamclub.com/airventure.

NORSK HØSTFEST

Each year, Norsk Høstfest draws tens of thousands of visitors to celebrate Scandinavian-American culture at the fairgrounds in Minot, North Dakota. Like Oshkosh, Minot is a small Midwestern town that swells during its popular fall festival, but instead of glorifying aviation, the Minot event honors its Nordic heritage.

Høstfest puts Scandinavian culture front and center, from authentic cuisine and handcrafted goods to daily seminars. This year's 37th annual event takes place September 30 through October 4 and



features headliners Merle Haggard, Doc Severinsen, B.J. Thomas and Herman's Hermits starring Peter Noone. Rounding out the entertainment are comedian Bill Engvall, singer Jennifer Nettles, singer-songwriter Josh Turner with special guest Danielle Bradbery, and the Grammy-winning Gaither Vocal Band.

Høstfest is offering special pricing for Good Sam members on five- and nine-day stays. Both packages include festival admission, reserved RV parking with electrical service, two seats in the Great Hall Wednesday through Saturday and two tickets to the History of Rock-n-Roll show. The nine-day package also includes two seats for the opening ceremony and concert, plus the RV dinner and dance.

For Good Sam members not purchasing packages, RV camping with electrical service is available for \$19 per night, and tickets to the Great Hall shows are \$62 per night. Good Sam members will camp together in a reserved section, be treated to daily doughnuts and coffee, and have free access to the RV parking lot shuttle. To order Good Sam Høstfest tickets, call 701-852-2368 or visit hostfest.com.

GOOD SAM EVENTS

WISCONSIN • July 28–August 3

Good Sam AirVenture Experience, Camp Scholler, Oshkosh
goodsamclub.com/airventure

MASSACHUSETTS • September 12

Southern New England Good Sam Family Fest, Normandy Farms Family Camping Resort, Foxboro, 866-673-2767

NORTH DAKOTA • September 30–October 4

Norsk Høstfest, North Dakota State Fairgrounds, Minot
hostfest.com, 701-852-2368

IDAHO • October 15–19

Sun Valley Jazz Jamboree, Sun Valley
208-377-7719

☎ For details about all of the upcoming Good Sam events, visit goodsamclub.com/events.

Good Sam ACTION LINE

NOT IN THE CONTRACT

Action Line: Good Sam member Charles Rigby canceled his RV warranty according to the terms of his contract but didn't receive the full refund. Feeling he was owed more, Rigby turned to Action Line for help:

My contract from American Guardian stipulates, "If you cancel after 60 days from purchase, we will refund to you 90 percent of the unearned pro rata premium paid." However, when I canceled the warranty, the refund amount of \$675.07 was denied because, I was told, "The contract allows for the deduction of claims paid." Because it doesn't say that in the original contract, I believe I am eligible for the refund without the deduction.

Action Line: After Action Line contacted American Guardian Warranty Services regarding Rigby's claim, he received a check for the full \$1,394.85. American Guardian's general counsel, Matthew Weil, sent Action Line the following explanation:

The cancellation processor improperly adjusted the cancellation in accordance with the regulations of the consumer's state of residence. This request should have been administered in accordance with the regulations of the state of Florida where the agreement was purchased from Conley RV Center. On behalf of American Guardian, I apologize for any confusion caused by this error.

COVERAGE CUTBACKS

Action Line: When the slide-out mechanism in his fifth-wheel failed, Kentucky Good Sam member Randy Stanley was pleased to find that the

component was still covered by the warranty. After learning that the warranty period had changed and the part was no longer covered, Stanley asked Action Line to step in:

When Lippert told me the gear pack warranty for our Cedar Creek fifth-wheel had changed from 36 months to 12 months, I contacted Forest River. They asked for a copy of the warranty, but I never heard anything back.

In the meantime, I had the gear pack replaced. When it began skipping again, Lippert shipped another gear pack and a new inner-slide tube. I had them both installed, bringing my total out-of-pocket expenses to \$1,472.55 for the parts and repairs. I feel Cedar Creek and Lippert should stand behind the original warranty.

Action Line: Danette Ray, warranty administrator for Forest River's Cedar Creek division, received Action Line's petition on Randy Stanley's behalf and sent the following note to Stanley:

Cedar Creek will reimburse you \$1,472.55.

RAISING THE ROOF

Action Line: Last September Good Sam Life members Dave and Lauren Curfman purchased a fifth-wheel from General RV Center in Birch

Since its start in 1981, Good Sam's RV consumer-resolution program has helped clear up thousands of disputes between members and RV dealers, manufacturers, service providers, accessory suppliers and warranty companies.

AMOUNT RECOVERED
\$694,910.63
Since September 2005

Run, Michigan. Following the walk-through, the couple was surprised to learn that the factory had incorrectly mounted the rear air conditioner and that General RV had remounted the unit and patched the roof:

Because of the repair to our brand new 2014 Keystone Alpine, General RV told us we were owed a new one-piece rubber roof. But later Keystone said they needed to evaluate the roof before consenting to replace it. After the technicians inspected the roof and took pictures, Keystone's verdict was that the patch job was sufficient.

The manufacturer's warranty is good for only one year. If this roof starts to leak after that, it will cost us thousands of dollars in repairs. We feel cheated. Can you help?

Action Line: After Action Line contacted Keystone RV to present the Curfmans' case, the couple shared the following good news:

Keystone has agreed to replace the full rubber roof, pay for our accommodations and reimburse us for one installment payment for our inconvenience.

GOOD SAM TO THE RESCUE

With more than 1.5 million members, the Good Sam Club has the clout to cut through red tape and resolve RV consumer disputes. After you've done your best to settle your disagreement, contact Action Line at goodsamclub.com/actionline, send an email to actionline@goodsamclub.com or write to Action Line, Good Sam Club, P.O. Box 90020, Bowling Green, Kentucky 42102-9020. Send a brief letter of explanation and copies of receipts and other pertinent records.



COLEMAN GRILL STOVE

Cooking outdoors is a cinch with the match-free lighting system on Coleman's propane grill stove. With 180 square inches of cooking surface and a powerful combined 20,000 Btu of heat, the two-burner appliance lets you sear steaks and sauté mushrooms at the same time. Wind-blocking technology and propane-pressure control keep the heat steady, and removable grates make cleanup easy.

Camping World Item Number: 50017

TEST RESULTS

The grill has plenty of Btu for its size. I never had to turn it up all the way. The size makes it great for travel.

Aaron Miller, Spring Grove, Pennsylvania

Not only did it generate enough heat for grilling but for cooking at the same time. The feet on the grill allow you to put it on a picnic table.

Von Starkey, Norcross, Georgia

We used it to grill hamburgers and hotdogs. The side burner came in handy for baked beans and pasta salad. The cooking time was perfect, and evenness throughout was great.

Bob and Lynn Pretzel, Eureka, California



CAMCO PORTABLE FLAGPOLE

RVers can fly two flags at once with Camco's telescoping RV flagpole. The anodized aluminum pole extends up to 20 feet to display the U.S. flag (included) or the nationality of your choice. There's even hardware to fly a second 3-by-5-foot flag. The metal wheelbase goes under your RV's tire, holding the pole in place. For easy storage, the pole collapses to 64 inches.

Camping World Item Number: 36113

TEST RESULTS

This is the best flagpole we've ever come across. The overall design is very user-friendly. It's just a classy way to display your flags while camping.

Kirk Jones, Clearfield, Utah

The flagpole is easy to set up and easy to handle. The quality is excellent. The nylon storage bag makes it easy to slide into an RV storage bin.

Ruth Carolyn Parent, Kenner, Louisiana

The connectors are easy to use and should last a long time. We'll definitely recommend this flagpole to friends.

Brian and Teresa Covington, Mandeville, Louisiana



PREST-O-FIT STEP HUGGERS

Because RV stairs take lots of abuse, Prest-O-Fit makes a stair rug to protect that high-traffic area. With snaps and hook-and-loop fasteners, the 23½-inch-wide Step Huggers rug is quick to install and simple to remove for cleaning. A selection of colors lets you match the rug to your RV's interior.

Camping World Item Numbers: 70481, 70482, 70483

TEST RESULTS

My wife and I had previously purchased other step covers for the RV but had a difficult time getting them to stay on. These are just what the doctor ordered.

Charles Spurgeon, Danville, Illinois

The heavy, durable material has solved our problem of having dirt tracked in. The rug keeps the RV tidy and looks great inside the coach.

David Biggerstaff, Sandpoint, Idaho

We love the ability to remove the Step Huggers easily for cleaning. The Velcro strips hold the rug in place very well.

Doug Scott, Pelham, New York



FREE STUFF

If you'd like to evaluate new products and perhaps see your comments published in *Highways*, sign up to be a Good Sam product tester. It's easy. Just click on goodsamclub.com/producttesting and fill in the form.

WHERE'S GOOD SAM?

Recognize the lofty peak behind the motorhome with the Good Sam sticker on the spare-tire cover? Let us know and you could be our next photo contest winner. To be in the running, email your guess to whereisgoodsam@goodsamclub.com, along with your name and mailing address. On July 31, we'll select one correct entry at random. Look for the answer and the \$50 winner in an upcoming issue of *Highways*.



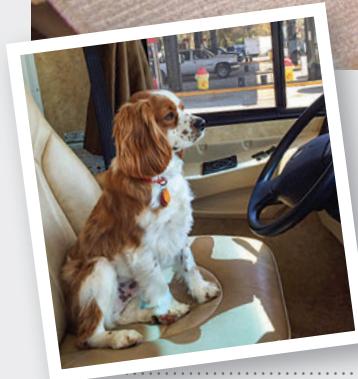
📍 HERE'S GOOD SAM!

On the way to Glacier National Park, Florida Good Sam member Walter Pinkus pulled over at Theodore Roosevelt National Park's Painted Canyon Overlook to take this photo of his Newmar Kountry Star, Jeep Liberty and Old Town canoe. North Dakotans Kathy and Joel Puffe correctly identified their home state's park and pocketed the \$50 winnings.

TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT

Can't identify this issue's location? There's another way to win. Take a snapshot of your RV in a scenic setting showing your Good Sam sticker, then email the photo to whereisgoodsam@goodsamclub.com, along with your name and mailing address. If we publish the photo in *Highways*, you'll receive a check for 50 bucks and more than 15 minutes of fame.

🐾 PET TALES



▲ While Arizona Good Sam member Nancy Wolf crosses the road to admire Idaho's Snake River, her husband, Bill, and their Persian cat, Yoshi, appreciate the view from the comfort of their RV.

◀ Charlie, a cockerlier spaniel, waits for Georgia members Bonnie and John Williams to fill up and get their Good Sam fuel discount at Pilot Flying J before heading to Florida for baseball's spring training season.

SHARE A PHOTO. Email your best RV pet picture to *Highways* at pettales@goodsamclub.com. Include a description of the photo along with the names of you and your pet(s) and your home town.



Dogs for the Deaf, a nonprofit organization supported by the Good Sam Club since 1980, has received millions of dollars over the years from Good Sam members, chapters and club headquarters. Based in Central Point, Oregon, Dogs for the Deaf is North America's oldest and largest Hearing Dog institution, providing dogs free of charge to people with a variety of physical and emotional challenges. dogsforthe deaf.org



THE ULTIMATE RV PATIO

SET OFF THE SEASON IN STYLE WITH A FRESH CROP OF OUTDOOR FURNISHINGS

While selecting an RV is based on its floorplan and interior furnishings, many of us would rather be outside, weather permitting. There's something very satisfying about setting up a site, taking in the surroundings and making friends with new neighbors. But beyond a pair of folding chairs and a side table, many RVers don't put a lot of effort into their outdoor living spaces, and that's a shame. What's under your patio awning makes it more welcoming, comfortable and personal, creating an area that's perfect for cooking, entertaining or relaxing on a summer day.

While each of us has our own idea of what constitutes the ultimate patio, we can all pretty much agree that it should be well equipped for your lifestyle and intended purpose, be portable and easy to take down and, of course, properly decorated. To inspire you to create your own ultimate patio, we've compiled this guide to more than 20 must-have items that will make you the envy of any RV park.

Our prediction: There will be a new TV reality show in the future called *RV Patio Wars*. Remember, you heard it here first!



Sitting and Lounging

Kelty created this portable love seat — it's the perfect size for two adults and has adjustable arms and even bottle openers right there with the beverage holders. The Kelty Low-Love Chair has a 12-inch seat height and a slight recline. It sells for around \$95, and you can get it at Sport Chalet at www.sportchalet.com.



Meet the Caravan Sports Infinity oversized zero-gravity chair. This recliner features lumbar support and an adjustable headrest, and folds down to just 6 inches thick for easy storage when not in use. The fabric is durable Textilene suspended by a double bungee system, and the chair can cradle up to 330 pounds. It costs less than \$100 and is available from Camping World at www.campingworld.com.

Cooking



Weber offers a couple of portable grills that are great for outdoor entertaining. The Weber Q 1000 has 189 square inches of cooking space — and for 2014, it's equipped with a split cooking grate, which means half of the grill can be removed and swapped out for a porcelain enameled cast-iron griddle (read: pancakes). The Weber Q 3200 has 393 inches of cooking space, as well as two stainless-steel burners, a built-in thermometer, electronic ignition and removable folding work tables, among its features. The Q 1000 costs about \$200, and the Q 3200 runs about \$400. Check them out at www.weber.com.

The Coleman RoadTrip NXT 300 propane grill has 20,000 Btu of cooking intensity, 321 square inches of cooking space (enough for 18 burgers!), Electric Instastart ignition (for matchless lighting) and a top-based thermometer so you don't have to open it to check the heat. Independently controlled Even-Temp burners, porcelain-coated cast-iron grills, stainless-steel side



Every Inch is **WITHIN REACH** with Adjust-A-Brush

When it comes to tough cleaning jobs, don't settle for just any brush. Adjust-A-Brush products stand up to the toughest dirt on your RV sides, wheels, windows and awnings.

9' reach

All-About Wash Brush with Telescoping Pole

QUICK Connect System

Quik Connect Accessories

Swivel Squeegee Attachment

14" Chenille Washer Attachment

4'-8' Padded Extension Pole with All-About Wash Brush

Easy twist on/off threaded system

Flo-Thru design

MADE IN THE U.S.A.



If it doesn't say Adjust-A-Brush, it's just a brush.

ON SALE NOW for Good Sam Club members at Camping World. Also available at other RV retailers.

tables and a scissor-leg design to fold down quickly round out the notables. It costs around \$280; check out www.coleman.com.



If you're a fan of charcoal versus gas grilling, the BBQ Pro might be up your alley. It's *über*-portable, and at only 14 inches and weighing less than 4 pounds, it's easy to carry and store. The BBQ Pro provides 151 inches of cooking space, and two locking clasps keep the lid in place. It sells for around \$20 at Kmart, www.kmart.com. A disposable

model with 93 square inches of cooking space can be had at Kmart for just \$5.



Trend alert: Smokers. They give great flavor to all kinds of meats. The Smokey Mountain Cooker from Weber boasts 286 square inches of cooking space, two plated-steel cooking grates and a

built-in lid thermometer. The smoker fits in most RV storage compartments. Available at Camping World and home supply stores for around \$220.

Utensils are only half the equation with the convenient Utensil Tree. Zippo came up with this outdoor accessory as a way to have — you guessed it — utensils at the ready, but also towels, cookware, condiments and spices. The Utensil Tree has an 8-inch top tray, a patio base and plenty of hooks. It breaks down for easy packing. Get it for about \$50 from Zippo at www.zippo.com.



Live As Well On The Road As You Do At Home



- Resists corrosion to allow for clean, steady water flow
- Single piece, lead-free waterway eliminates o-ring leaks
- Tough, easy to clean surface



ON SALE NOW! PLUS, \$39 INSTALLATION at Camping World for Good Sam Club Members. Also available at other RV retailers.





Lighting

Any patio light can help when the sun goes down, but it takes something special to create ambience. These elegant etched bronze Globe Lights from Polymer Products can diffuse light from bulbs up to 60 watts. Made

in the United States, the six globes are shatter- and water-resistant, and are connected via a heavy-duty coiled cord that stretches to 30 feet (a 20-foot straight extension cord is also included). Find the Globe Lights at Camping World for less than \$100.



Mosquitoes ruining the party? Terminix offers a solution with its AllClear Mosquito Mister Lantern. It's a functional lantern with a button that controls a replaceable repellent-mist canister. According to the company, the nontoxic mist covers 300 square feet for up to 10 hours with an all-natural lemongrass repellent. That means it's not a problem to stay put on your ultimate RV patio when it's activated, and your pets can stay put, too. Learn more and find out where to buy it for about \$60 at www.allclearmister.com.

TBC presents **BEWARE OF THE PEDESTAL**

RV's Are At The Mercy Of The Power Pedestal

Available In Hardwires, Portables and RVC Compatible Automatic Transfer Switch Models

SURGE GUARD
RV Power Protection
Don't Plug-In Without It!

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Tiki torches are a sure sign of a party — and you can help get yours started with the Tiki 4-in-1 Torch. As the name implies, it can be used four different ways: as a full-size torch, a garden torch, a deck-rail-mounted torch or a tabletop torch — just by changing pole sections. The torch burns Tiki Citronella or Off BiteFighter torch fuel to keep the bugs at bay. It has a real flame, so make sure to keep it away from awnings and other combustibles. Available at Camping World for around \$20.

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Mr. Heater's Big Buddy heats up to 400 square feet. Set it on low, and the portable propane heater will do its work for 220 hours. It has push-button ignition — no matches needed. A built-in fan is how it spreads heat evenly, and the multiposition heat-level knob controls 4,000, 9,000 or 18,000 Btu. Dimensions are 17.5 x 17 x 10 inches, and the price is less than \$150. Shop for it at Cabela's at www.cabelas.com or Walmart at www.walmart.com.



Burning ring of fire? That would be the Redwood from Camp Chef, a portable gas firepit with a high-pressure burner and 12 pounds of lava rock. No wood and no smoke. It comes with a 55,000-Btu burner and four extendable roasting sticks. The MSRP is \$175 at www.campchef.com, but you can get it for less from Camping World.

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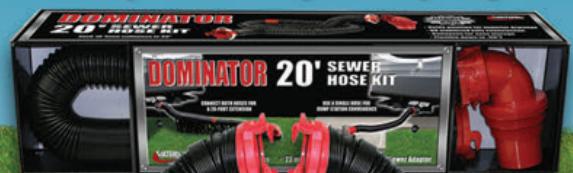
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THE ULTIMATE RV PATIO



When shade isn't enough, employ the power of evaporative cooling. The MistyMate Cool Camper 6 mister includes a portable 2-gallon tank plus 10 feet of lead line and 6 feet of mist line. The mister uses clip-on attachments to secure the line to the awning. The tank is pressurized using a pump handle, and the system requires no electrical power. Use it with filtered, soft or distilled water to prevent hard-water stains on the coach and awning. The MSRP is \$70 at www.mistymate.com, but you can find the Cool Camper 6 for less at a variety of retailers including Amazon at www.amazon.com and Camping World.

If you've thrown your share of parties, you know you can never have too much ice. The Dometic HZB-15S portable stainless-steel icemaker makes up to 33 pounds of the frozen stuff every 24 hours, and the first ice production takes less than 15 minutes. It has a 6-foot power cord, handles and a removable basket. Power is via 120-volt AC at 2.5 amps. Camping World has the icemaker for less than \$300.

The good ol' fashioned ice chest has finally been rendered obsolete. Dometic's TropiCool 37-quart Cooler/Warmer keeps cold foods at a range of 32 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit or warm foods at 118 to 150 degrees. A seven-stage temperature regulation with LED display features a memory function that saves the most recent power setting. A membrane keypad protects the electronics from dust and moisture. The unit operates on 12-volt DC and includes a 120-volt AC adapter. It retails for around \$360 at Camping World.





Cooking outdoors is great fun, but stepping into and out of the rig or having ingredients spread out on a table isn't the most efficient way to present al fresco treats. The Folding Camp Pantry offers three shelves to hold supplies, a zippered door with hook-and-loop restraining straps and two rear mesh panels for ventilation. Made from weather-resistant, heavy-duty fabric, the pantry measures 31.5 inches high, 23 inches wide and 18.5 inches deep, and folds for easy storage in its own bag. It sells for about \$50 at Camping World.

Once all that tasty food is prepared for outdoor dining, you'll want to keep the bugs away, and the Mesh Food Cover from Intersource Enterprises is a simple and elegant way to do it. Just pull a string at the base of the cover to open

it umbrella-style, and the 48-inch-long, 24-inch-wide cover locks open to protect your grub from insects. It snaps shut for easy storage and weighs less than 1 pound. The mesh material allows air to flow through to prevent condensation. Find it at Camping World for about \$10.



Most of us don't necessarily think about where to put the trash when we're done. The StorMate Garbage Bag Holder from Thetford sets up to hold a 13-gallon or larger tall kitchen bag, then collapses into an easy-to-store 14.5 x 11.5 x 2-inch size. You can find it for less than \$15 at Camping World.

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THE ULTIMATE RV PATIO



Flooring

Portable decks for RVs? Yup, DeckedOut RV Products has them. These low-profile deck surfaces can be set up or put away in mere moments. The maintenance-free Shore Series is made of anodized extruded aluminum and teak or mahogany, and starts at less than \$2,000. The Shore Sidekick measures 23 x 48 inches, compared to its 8-, 10- and 12-foot counterparts, and sells for \$259. The Alfresco Series is made of marine-grade sapele ply with a texture similar to African mahogany. Prices start at about \$2,390. The Alfresco also has a Sidekick version that sells for \$279. Learn more at www.deckedoutrvproducts.com.

The Prest-O-Fit Patio Rug is not only durable and weather-resistant, it has rustproof aluminum grommets for stake-down. Choose from a couple of sizes — 6 x 15 feet and 8 x 20 feet — and various colors including green, burgundy wine, harvest gold and brown. The rug retails for less than \$150 at Camping World.



Tables

This Roll-Top Table from Cabela's is compact and lightweight. It's made from aluminum, so it's easy to clean and tough to scratch or otherwise destroy. Two sizes are available — 28 x 28 inches and 28 x 43 inches — with telescoping legs for changing the height from 27 to 33 inches. The table rolls up into a carrying bag. It's available from Cabela's at prices starting around \$70.



Here's a remedy for campground tables that are dirty, splintered, uncomfortable or all of the above. The water-resistant and easy-to-clean Table Cover and Pads set from Four Corners is made of blue-and-white-checked vinyl with a soft flannel backing. Lightly padded seat covers make hard picnic benches more comfortable, and the boxed-end construction and cord locks help keep everything in place. The set fits tables and benches up to 6 feet long and costs about \$40 at Camping World.

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No patio table? No problem when you have the handy Folding Picnic Table from Lifetime. Made from UV-protected polyethylene and powder-coated steel, it's tough, stain-resistant, splinter-free and easy to clean. The table folds flat for storage and weighs 95 pounds, according to the manufacturer. Unfolded, it measures 72 inches long, 30 inches wide and 29 inches high. Backed by a two-year limited warranty, the table is available at a variety of retailers for less than \$200 and online at www.buylifetime.com.

Miscellany



As the saying goes, "It's 5 o'clock somewhere!" With this Portable Bar from Best of Times, you can turn an RV patio into party headquarters. Featuring steel-frame construction and standard bar height, the bar sets up in minutes without tools. Three levels of shelving hold cans and bottles, and a drop-in cooler holds a case of drinks or ice. It comes with

four padded stools, an umbrella, a side table and a travel bag with wheels. Customize your own or choose from a variety of designs for around \$600 at www.bestoftimesusa.com.

Bring some '50s cool to any patio with Bloem's Pink Flamingo pair. Proudly made in the USA, these eye-catching birds stand 27 and 24 inches high, and feature all-weather durability so their color won't fade and their legs won't rust. The Pink Flamingo set retails for around \$10 at Camping World. 🦩



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 EQUAL HOUSING LENDER



article and photos by Chris Hemer

EASY AIR

The 2wayair system by Rock Smasher Engineering allows inflation or deflation of all tires simultaneously

If there's one thing that all RVers can agree upon, it's that checking and adjusting tire pressure on the tow vehicle and trailer is a pain in one's backside. Without a doubt, proper tire-inflation pressure is critical to safe RV travel, and tire manufacturers typically recommend that inflation pressure be checked and adjusted before and during travel. But getting down on one knee and moving around a truck and trailer with a gauge and an air hose — if you can even find a source for compressed air — is a time-consuming process at best; in extreme temperatures, it can become downright uncomfortable. If you've got a dually and a tandem- or triple-axle trailer, we don't need to tell you how long the process takes — and if you routinely air up or down to travel off-road, you've likely invested in a pair of kneepads and a stool by now.

The fact is, as much as we all hate having to constantly check and adjust tire pressure, no one has come up with a more convenient way to do it — until now.

Rock Smasher Engineering (RSE) is a start-up company founded by a group of engineers who have designed suspensions for everything from road-race motorcycles to off-road trucks. As off-road enthusiasts themselves, they worked for several years to develop a system that would make it easier to air-up and -down when traveling off-road and created a product they call 2wayair.

2wayair is a universal fit central manifold system that allows users to inflate or deflate all tires on the vehicle at the same time using polyurethane tubing, nylon ties, specially designed Schrader valves and an assortment of push-to-connect fittings. The idea behind 2wayair is that it fits any vehicle (just specify



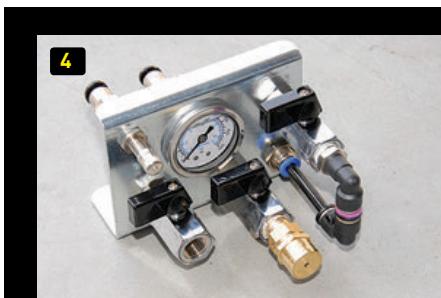
The 2wayair kit for six tires comes standard with two small sections of protective polyethylene tubing, 40 feet of black $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch polyurethane manifold tubing, 15 feet of $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch black polyurethane tubing, 24 feet of yellow polyurethane "whip" tubing plus UV-rated mountable and standard nylon ties, and an assortment of push-to-connect and quick-disconnect fittings and patent-pending mountable Schrader valves.



four, six or eight tires), installs with a minimum amount of tools and can be used quickly in a harsh off-road environment.

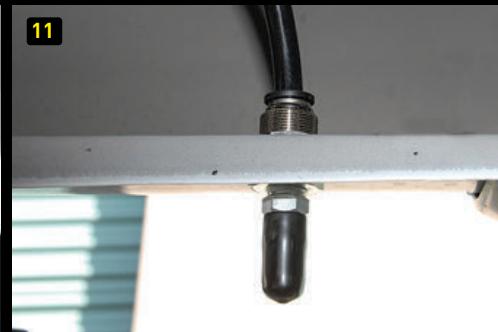
Here's how the system works: The $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch manifold tubing runs along either side of the vehicle. It T's into smaller $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch tubing that runs to each corner of the vehicle where one of the

(1, 2) The 2wayair system is designed for universal application, so the first step is to locate the most convenient area to air-up/air-down the tow vehicle. Because this truck has an air compressor mounted under the hood, the decision was made to mount the main control panel in the same location. With that decided, we began by brushing Teflon paste on the components prior to assembly. Shown here is the mini control valve, which is the main control valve for the system. The components are then assembled and tightened. (3) Several different mounting brackets are offered to suit a variety of applications, ranging from the basic to the sophisticated. Here, the assembly of the master control panel is under way; in the center is a liquid filled 160 psi gauge, and in the foreground is the Schrader valve with a push-to-connect adapter (top) and a mini control valve with a push-to-connect bulkhead fitting.



(4, 5) Here is the finished control panel viewed from front and rear. Front view shows the Schrader valve (left), which allows the user to attach a gauge (or any standard inflation device) and the three ball-valve assemblies, which offer different functions. From left, the first valve is used to quickly air down all six tires for better traction in mud, snow, etc. It can also be fitted with a common male D-type connector to inflate all tires at once with the quick-disconnect from a compressed air hose. This is an important feature, since finding clear access to filling stations where a hose can reach all tires can be difficult. The centralized valve design allows the user to "nudge" up to the air source and inflate all tires the rest of the way without stretching hoses. The center ball valve is fitted with a brass pressure-relief valve that is preset in this application to 80 psi; once that pressure is reached, the valve "burps" additional pressure until the inflation source (air compressor, air tank, etc.) is turned off. To the right is the main control valve, which allows air into the system; it can be closed so the 2wayair system does not interfere with other onboard air systems that may be on the vehicle. In the center is the aforementioned liquid-filled pressure gauge. Note that all fittings are O-ring sealed, push-to-connect. (6) Here the main control panel is shown mounted under the hood with the supplied hardware, just below the onboard air compressor. Now the rest of the system is ready to be plumbed. (7, 8) Find a place near each tire where the Schrader valves can be mounted. On the front of this Dodge Ram dually, we decided to mount the valves in the pinch weld underneath the rocker panel. A $\frac{5}{16}$ -inch hole was drilled and the valve mounted. Adjustment nuts allow the valves to be mounted in any material thickness; the only requirement is that $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch of the valve protrudes so the quick-connect fittings can be attached.

EASY AIR



kit's Schrader valves is mounted. Once the system is plumbed, all the user needs to do is connect "whips" with quick-connect fittings to the Schrader valve on the tire and the vehicle, and inflate all tires at once using a central inflation point, which can be located anywhere you want (common choices are under the hood and front bumper). The system balances the pressure in all tires during inflation, so even if one tire is higher or lower than the others, they all inflate to the same pressure. And because the system is not pressurized unless an air source is

connected and the connection points are closed, there's no danger of losing pressure out of the tires if one of the lines were to become severed.

The system's design is at once simple and sophisticated. For example, the central inflation point is a common Schrader valve, but all kits also come with a mini control valve that can be fitted with a common male D-type connector (the same used on compressed air lines) so you have the option of inflating with an air hose, an air/CO₂ tank or whatever. Polyurethane

(9) Dually kits use a male D-type connector at the rear. First, a Unibit is used to drill a .790-inch hole in the rocker panel near the tires, then a D-type push-to-connect bulkhead adapter is installed using a nut on the other side. (10) The male D-type fitting is then installed into the bulkhead adapter and tightened. Typically, a female fitting is used on the supply side of an air system, but here a female D-type connector is more likely to become clogged with dirt and debris. A male fitting has no moving parts, and the plastic cap keeps dirt out. (11) Here is the rear D-type fitting (with cap) and adapter, with the 3/8-inch polyurethane manifold tubing pushed into place.

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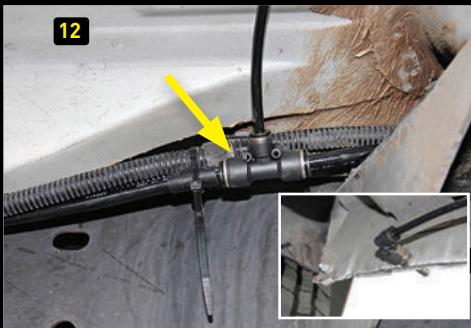
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tubing was chosen instead of the more common nylon for several reasons. First and foremost, it's flexible and can't kink. Second, this particular tubing is food grade, meaning it is manufactured to a much higher standard than industrial tubing. Finally, it's very easy to work with and cut, which makes it possible to install or repair the system anywhere.

To keep installation simple, all fittings are push-to-connect — there are no hose clamps. The tubing itself can be fastened with two different varieties of UV-rated nylon ties: standard and

(12) The main 3/8-inch manifold tubing is run along an existing wiring loom and secured with supplied nylon ties. The stiff polyethylene tubing is used to cover the manifold tubing to prevent chafing wherever a tie is used. Alternately, the manifold tubing can be secured by drilling 3/16-inch holes along the plumbing route and the mountable cable ties used. The polyurethane tubing has a temperature limit of 160 degrees, so make sure to route it away from heat sources. The 3/8-inch manifold tubing is then cut near the front wheel, and the 3/8-inch to 1/4-inch T installed (arrow). The 1/4-inch tubing is routed to the front Schrader valve mounted earlier. (13) Here you can see the route from the main 3/8-inch manifold tubing to the T-fitting and the 1/4-inch tubing running to the front Schrader valve. The process is then repeated on the other side of the vehicle. (14) All of the manifold tubing converges at the control panel under the hood. The 3/8-inch manifold tubing from either side of the vehicle is tied to the main control valve with a 3/8-inch T-fitting. All of the peripherals — i.e. the gauge, the Schrader valve, the pressure relief valve and the onboard air line — T into the main manifold. It's easier to install than it is to explain, believe us. The air compressor was then plumbed into the system with a male D-type quick-disconnect fitting and 1/4-inch FIP by 1/4-inch OD push-to-connect adapter. The user now has three options for airing-up (female D-type from an air hose, the Schrader valve or the onboard air compressor that is plumbed in).



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EASY AIR

mountable. The mountable ties have small anchors that push into an existing or predrilled $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch hole; simply push the anchor into place, insert the manifold tubing and zip it closed. RSE even supplies sections of hard polyethylene tubing to protect the manifold tubing wherever it is mounted, so there are no concerns over chafing. Last, but certainly not least, anyplace the manifold tubing passes through metal is bulkheaded, so the polyurethane never makes contact with sharp edges.

Realizing that the system could be used on anything from a short wheelbase Jeep to a tag-axle motorhome, RSE designed 2wayair to be modular so the base system can be custom tailored to the application and/or upgraded with a variety of available accessories. One of the most popular options is a liquid-filled, vibration-resistant air-pressure gauge kit and a pressure-relief valve that can be preset at the factory to the tire's inflation pressure. Simply connect an air



[15] With the system plumbing completed, it's time to build the whips. Simply measure from the Schrader valve on the vehicle to the Schrader valve on the tire at its farthest possible point, then cut the material. A tubing cutter designed specifically for this purpose is offered through RSE for \$9.95. You can use a razor if you want, but the cut must be absolutely straight to ensure a leak-free seal. Once cut to length, simply direct the tubing into the push-to-connect adapters installed in the quick-connect fittings. RSE applies Teflon tape for the adapter fittings from the factory. **[16]** Whenever a tire or tires are to be inflated (or in this case inflated/deflated), simply connect the whip to the Schrader valve on the vehicle and tire, and turn clockwise until they lock — about a quarter-turn.

source, or in the case of an onboard air compressor, just open the valve. When the air pressure reaches the set point on the relief valve, the valve makes a loud "burping" noise. This is the valve bleeding off excess air, which prevents overinflation of the tires. Disconnect the

whips, and you are ready to travel. There are also a variety of mounting brackets available so all accessories can be mounted in one place, or individually.

RSE offers its 2wayair kits for four wheels (cars, trucks and vans), six wheels (duallies and motorhomes) and



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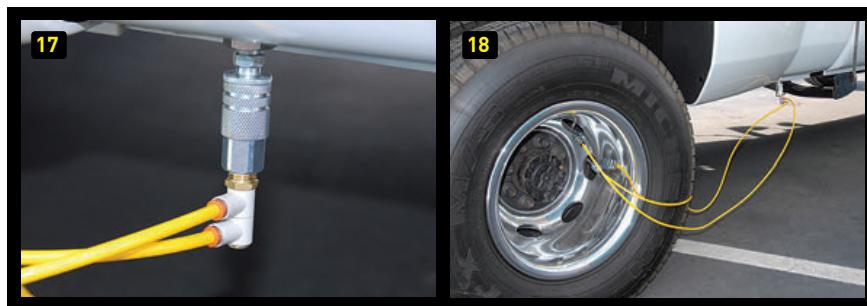
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• **Adjustable - 15-85psi**

eight wheels (tag-axle motorhomes). And recently, the company released kits for single-, double- and triple-axle trailers, as well as a jumper hose that will connect the 2wayair system on the tow vehicle to the one on the trailer. By using separate valves and connecting/disconnecting whips, it is possible to inflate the tires on the tow rig and trailer to different pressures.

To test the 2wayair system, we contacted RSE and requested a six-tire master kit (\$319.95) to be mounted on a 2000 Dodge Ram extended cab dually. Because this particular truck carries a camper and occasionally ventures off road, RSE also recommended a pressure-relief valve (\$24.95), pressure-relief valve mounting kit (\$29.95), onboard air kit (enables the system to be connected to an onboard air system, \$44.95), 160 PSI gauge kit (\$84.95) and a master control panel (\$12.95), bringing the grand total to \$517.70. Considering the convenience afforded by this system (which will likely outlast the vehicle),



(17) The double whip for the rear dual wheels consists of a unique articulating fitting that can be turned to create the optimum angle for either tire. It is installed in the back of a female D-type connector, which can then be quickly attached to the male D-type connector underneath the rear rocker panel. **(18)** Here are the rear duals with the double whip connected.

that's a pretty reasonable price.

Since no shop space was available for this project, it was installed on the truck right in the storage parking lot, proving RSE's claim that the system can be installed pretty much anywhere. Installation took roughly three hours, and once connected, it worked as promised. We had only a couple of minor problems: The pressure-relief valve required minor adjustment to bypass

at the tire's 80 PSI preset, and we soon found out that the onboard air pump was not up to the task of continuous duty and had to be replaced.

The 2wayair system is an innovative solution to an age-old problem. Once you try it, you'll never air-up your vehicle's tires the "old" way again. 🚛

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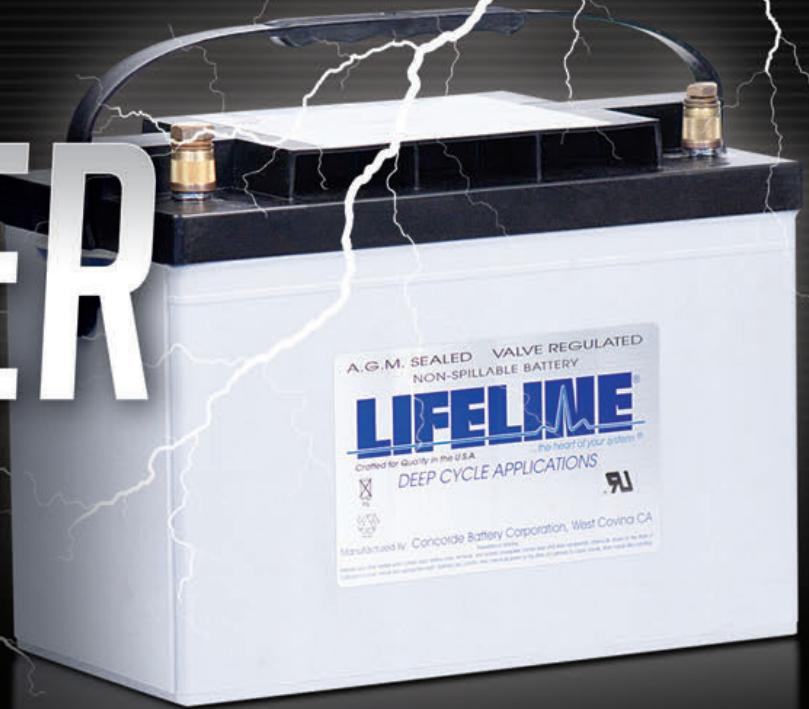
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POWER BANK



Learning how to maintain RV batteries makes for a happier travel experience

A battery is one of those components that we don't often think about until something goes wrong, either in the form of an engine that won't start or trailer interior lights that begin to dim long before the night is over. Sometimes we take for granted that batteries are the lifeblood of the 12-volt DC electrical system, particularly when dry camping. If you don't have the right batteries or maintain them correctly, they will most assuredly fail you at the most inopportune moment.

A Little History

Batteries have been starting motor vehicles since about 1912 when Cadillac put an electric starter on production models. Less than a decade later, Ford ditched hand-crank starting on its Model T, and the rush for batteries was on.

Way back then, a battery was made of lead and acid, and you might be surprised to learn that the majority

of batteries today are still made with essentially the same ingredients. The rechargeable battery that starts a tow vehicle is typically a lead-acid type that uses six galvanic (electric currents produced by a chemical reaction) cells in series to provide a 12-volt system. The battery usually has six plates of lead, additional lead dioxide plates, and is submerged in a solution of sulfuric acid and water called electrolyte. The resultant chemical reaction releases electrons and allows them to flow through conductors to produce electricity. This type of battery is called a flooded cell.

Now that it's more than 100 years later, the demands that we put on batteries have gone up dramatically. Just starting the

engine is only one of its duties. Today's vehicles come with stereos, navigation units, electric windows and power-adjustable seats with electric heating, and consumers find plenty more electric-powered devices to add to their vehicles, from auxiliary lighting to power-operated steps.



(Top) Lifeline AGM batteries are sealed and available in a number of sizes. (Right) Golf-cart batteries wired in series are popular with RVers.

Battery Types

As the years progressed, battery technology changed to keep up with rising demands. Flooded cell batteries are still the most widely used batteries today — but perhaps the greatest advancement was the valve-regulated lead-acid (VRLA) design. Commonly called sealed lead-acid batteries or maintenance-free batteries, VRLA batteries are sealed and have a one-way valve to vent gasses if they exceed atmospheric pressure by a selected amount.

A gel battery, also known as gel cell, is one in which silicates are added to the electrolyte material to make it a gel. These VRLA batteries are of the maintenance-free variety but should not be confused with absorbed glass mat (AGM) batteries, which are incorrectly referred to as gel-cell batteries. An AGM battery utilizes a fiberglass mat material in which the electrolyte has been absorbed. These batteries are therefore “dry” internally and are more resistant to vibration and shock than their flooded cell counterparts.

Starting Batteries Versus Deep-Cycle

Every RVer has two types of batteries to deal with: the starting batteries that get our tow vehicles running and deep-cycle batteries that provide



Optima Batteries use SpiraCell technology in an AGM design for both tight manufacturing control and a unique look that has seen strong sales since coming to the market in the early '90s.

12-volt DC power.

When considering a new starting battery, most of us are prone to the bigger-is-better mentality, but you might be surprised to learn that this isn't always the case. For example, most of us gravitate toward the battery with the highest possible cold cranking amps (CCA) or the ability to start an

engine in cold temperatures.

Those of us who live in hot climates likewise gravitate toward high-CCA batteries because we know that hot engines can also be difficult to crank, but in this case, higher CCA is not the solution. The higher the CCA rating, the more plates per cell the battery has, which displaces the liquid electro-

AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF BATTERIES

1800

Italian physicist Alessandro Volta makes the first battery, the voltaic pile, using stacks of zinc, copper and saltwater-moistened cardboard.

1859

French physicist Gaston Planté comes up with the lead-acid battery that we are all familiar with as a device for starting vehicles.

1868

French chemist Georges Leclanché creates what evolves into the dry-cell battery. It's much cheaper to construct and more robust.

1896

Cleveland's National Carbon Company (later the Eveready Battery Company and today known as Energizer) makes the first commercially available battery, the 1.5-volt Columbia.

1900s

Thomas Edison improves the car battery, making it lighter and cheaper to manufacture. However, several missteps lead to his battery missing out on powering electric-starter motors on vehicles, which come to prominence around 1912.

1960s

German engineers come up with a spill-proof lead-acid gel-cell battery. The batteries contain sulfuric acid mixed with silica powder to form a gel-type substance.

lyte and actually makes the battery run hotter. A hot battery doesn't perform as intended, and won't last as long.

How you use your tow vehicle can also determine the battery you choose. For example, if your vehicle has a lot of electrical accessories that you use when the engine is turned off, it's possible to exceed the capacity of the stock battery and discharge it more than was intended. In this case, you should seek a battery with maximum reserve capacity. This attribute, which often isn't on the battery's label, is the amount of minutes the battery will take to discharge with a 25-amp draw.

For example, a 120-minute

If batteries are used through a power inverter to run a microwave, television and other 120-volt AC appliance when not hooked up to shorepower, a gel design deep-cycle battery like the Dominator from Deka is a good way to go.



1970s-'80s

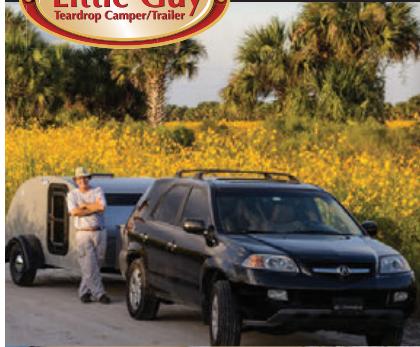
The lead-acid car battery continues to be refined with absorbent glass mat (AGM) technology. The acid is not mixed with a gel, but instead micro-fibers keep the acid contained. Internal ventilation systems prevent spilling.

2000s

Lithium-ion batteries become popular for use in laptop computers, mobile phones, digital cameras and toys, as well as in electric cars and golf carts. They are still prohibitively expensive for use in an RV.

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reserve-capacity battery would be completely discharged after two hours but could still possibly start the vehicle after one hour. The counterperson at an auto-parts store should be able to look up the reserve capacity of the battery or batteries you're considering. Alternately, the technical services department of a battery company can also help you find a battery with adequate reserve capacity.

A deep-cycle battery delivers a lower level of power for a much longer period of time. Deep-cycle batteries don't have as many CCA as starting batteries and won't provide as many starts. However, where a starting battery might survive only 20 to 30 deep discharges, a deep-cycle battery can withstand repetitive discharges to a 50 percent depth of discharge or more and continue to provide the rated capacity after hundreds of cycles. This characteristic, combined with more reserve capacity, makes deep-cycle batteries ideal for use in RV applications.

A deep-cycle battery differs from its automotive counterpart in its internal construction. There are typically fewer plates inside a deep-cycle battery than an automotive battery, but they are normally thicker and hold more lead-oxide paste, which chemically



Batteries get used and abused more often than they are treated kindly. Keeping them charged and clean and discharging them properly are usually all it takes to get maximum battery life.

reacts with the sulfuric acid of the electrolyte. The paste itself is usually a higher density as well.

In an RV, reserve capacity is the primary consideration, and as with a tow vehicle, you can get more by going bigger, by adding batteries or by doing both. Most RVs have more than one house battery, and if they suit your needs already, you may choose to go with direct replacements, or upgrade to bigger batteries, if they'll fit. You'll want

batteries with the highest amp-hour (Ah) rating you can find. For example, a 100-Ah battery is one that will produce 5 amps for 20 hours at 80 degrees Fahrenheit (26.7 Celsius) before it reaches 1.75 volts per cell, or 10.5 volts.

For those with more demanding power needs, adding 12-volt batteries and connecting them in parallel will double the amount of time before the batteries are discharged. Another route is to opt for 6-volt golf-cart batteries, which are connected in series to produce 12 volts. This setup can endure more deep discharges than a 12-volt marine/RV product (sometimes twice as many), which makes it popular with RVers who want the ability to operate their RVs through an inverter on battery power only. Remember: Parallel combines amps, not voltage. Series

REMEMBER: PARALLEL COMBINES AMPS, NOT VOLTAGE. SERIES COMBINES VOLTAGE, NOT AMPS.



RECYCLING

While it might seem on the surface that a product made of lead and acid would be a nightmare for recycling, the reality is quite the opposite. About 98 percent of all battery lead is recycled. Compare that to 55 percent of aluminum cans, 45 percent of newspapers, 26 percent of glass bottles and 26 percent of tires. Being first in class for recycling is the result of a closed loop life cycle; a brand-new battery actually contains 60 to 80 percent recycled lead and plastic. Every time a battery is discarded, it is sent to a permitted recycler where the lead and plastic are reclaimed using strict environmental controls and then sent to a new battery manufacturer.



Building a battery bank that will meet the demands of the individual owner will usually be dictated by the available space to mount the batteries. Here, two slide-out trays can handle four batteries. It's important to have access to the batteries for maintenance and enough clearance to remove caps to replenish flooded cell batteries.

combines voltage, not amps.

If the trailer has multiple batteries, it's important to consider them as a single system. As such, it's not a good idea to replace or upgrade only one battery; all of the batteries should be replaced with the same size and type. Placing a new battery in parallel with older or weaker batteries makes the new one work harder and will eventually make it as weak as the others.

Battery Maintenance

Battery maintenance is the key to long-lasting performance, although it's typically not required as frequently as it once was. Though the vast majority of batteries in use today are the flooded cell variety, most of these, even those with removable caps, are still considered maintenance-free under normal conditions. However, it's still good practice to have the battery visually inspected and tested every few months.

If the battery does require water, it's preferred to replenish with distilled water, though tap water is acceptable in a pinch. Also, make sure that the electrolyte (water) covers the plates inside by a minimum of 1/2 inch. If air contacts those plates for any length of time, it hardens the chemical-paste material on the plates and causes them to sulfate. Once that happens, there is a good chance that part of the plate is not going to be

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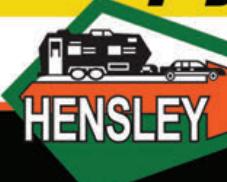
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POWER BANK



(Above left) Handheld battery-load testers are available for as little as \$35. However, they typically apply only 75 to 85 amps, which is not adequate to test an automotive starting battery with high CCA. To do this correctly requires a professional-quality load tester that can apply half of the battery's CCA for 15 seconds. **(Above right)** Another great tool to have is a digital voltmeter, or multimeter. The one shown here is a professional model, but you can find a simple one for around \$15 to \$20. Touch the probes to the appropriate terminals, and the battery's voltage is displayed on the screen. This one's at 12.33 volts — about 70 percent charged.

chemically usable anymore. In other words, the percentage of battery performance that's lost is not coming back.

Keeping batteries charged is obviously important, but what may not be so obvious is how to keep them charged. Leaving an RV plugged in when not in use isn't necessarily a good idea, as an overzealous charger can cook the batteries dry. A simple check is to plug the RV in for about a week; if the battery gets hot or loses water, it's being overcharged and shouldn't be left plugged in. Otherwise, the charger can be plugged in for a couple of weeks at a time, but a more reliable solution is to charge the batteries for a day or so once a month. This will keep them topped off without the danger of overcharging.

If the batteries are removed from the tow vehicle or RV, make sure a compatible battery charger is used. It is best to recharge batteries at a current (amp) level of battery amp-hours divided by 5 for fast charging, 10 for slower charging. Example: A 100-Ah battery divided by 5 equals a 20-amp

charger. Many battery chargers have adjustable amp settings, which is handy for different battery types.

Battery maintainers are also a popular choice for keeping batteries topped off, but here again, make sure it's compatible with the battery or batteries. Prior to using the maintainer for an extended period of time, make sure the unit is actually maintaining the proper voltage and check to see if it's making the battery lose water. After a few days, disconnect the maintainer for a couple of hours and then use a voltmeter or hydrometer to check the level of charge. A voltmeter should be around 12.7 to 12.8 volts, while a hydrometer should show a specific gravity number of 1.265 to 1.275, meaning the battery is at or near 100 percent charged.

After the batteries have sat for several months without charging or being on a maintenance charge, they may require equalization. While this is a fairly involved topic unto itself, suffice it to say that equalization is a term

meaning to de-sulfate or equalize individual cells of a battery. This is done through the use of a charger or converter that has the ability to charge at a high voltage (typically 15.6 to 16.2 volts) at a low current level in an attempt to break the sulfate crystals off the inner cell-paste material. Some manufacturers recommend equalization after 30 to 50 charge/discharge cycles, while others don't recommend equalization at all; check with the battery manufacturer to be sure. Note: Battery equalization is for flooded cell batteries only. Don't attempt to equalize a gel-cell or AGM battery.

Last but not least, always make



sure the battery is properly secured, the terminals are clean and the connections are tight. An improperly secured battery can bang around on its tray, causing internal damage. Loose or dirty connections can cause starting or charging problems.

If the terminals are caked in whitish powder, it's time for a thorough cleaning. Disconnect the battery, then mix about one part baking soda in four parts water and pour it over the terminals. When the foaming subsides, rinse well with water, and the terminals should be clean again. Mix another batch, and dip the connectors (terminals), one at a time. Dry everything thoroughly, reconnect the terminals and apply a small amount of grease or commercial terminal protectant to the connections to help retard oxidation.

What's Next?

Battery technology continues to evolve, and advances in lithium-ion engineering may completely upend the industry eventually. But for now, lead acid is still the mainstay of the RV market. It's important to pick the right product for the application and then pay attention to it over the years.

Like one battery manufacturers says in its literature, "It's not always blue skies and open roads. Be ready." 🚗

A hydrometer is an easy and inexpensive way to check the health of an open-cell battery. Simply insert the tube into a cell, squeeze and release the bulb, and electrolyte (water) is drawn into the hydrometer's chamber. Ideally, the specific gravity number should be 1.265 to 1.275 when fully charged. Repeating this process in each cell will help determine if there are any weak or dead cells. Temperature-correcting hydrometers (not shown) are best.

SOURCES

Deka (East Penn)	610-682-6361, www.dekabatteries.com
Exide Technologies	678-566-9000, www.exide.com
Interstate Batteries	866-842-5368, www.interstatebatteries.com
Lifeline Batteries	909-599-7816, www.lifelinebatteries.com
Odyssey Battery	800-538-3627, www.odysseybattery.com
Optima Batteries	888-867-8462, www.optimabatteries.com
Trojan Battery Company	562-236-3000, www.trojanbattery.com

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Whether shopping for a new RV or updating the appliances and accessories for your current RV, Dometic's wide range of products will help you discover new adventures in style. These easy-to-use products offer the value and durability owners want for their active RV and outdoor lifestyle.

Awnings

When you buy a Dometic RV awning, you buy quality based on decades of experience in developing innovative awning products. The complete line of patio, door and window awnings help improve the comfort level of your RV.

If simplicity is important, look no further than Dometic's 9100 Power and Manual Awnings. The 9100 Power Awning opens and retracts with ease by pressing a wall-mounted switch, while the manual version opens with self-locking lift handles. It features woven acrylic or double-sided vinyl fabric, with hardware color choices of Polar White, Silver, Black and Champagne. Double-sided colors include Linen Fade Sandstone, Bark, Onyx, Meadow Green, Azure and Maroon, with race flag and rodeo specialty designs at an additional fee. Acrylic Shadow fabric colors are Blue, Teal, Burgundy, Forest Green, Sand and Black & Gray.

The Dometic 9500 Power and Manual Case Awnings offer the same easy deployment, rugged construction and style, with heavy-duty, double-sided vinyl Linen Fade fabric. Lateral arms are designed to withstand heavy use, and the manual pitch adjustment helps you enjoy shade every time of the day. The automatic Rain Shed prevents rainwater from pooling on the awning. 9500 Power models are available in 12V or 110V operation.

The Dometic 8500 Manual Awning features heavy-duty polyester-reinforced, double-sided, Linen Fade vinyl fabric. It is available with straight or curved hardware to fit virtually any vehicle. Universal hardware is designed for effortless one-person operation. Complement your patio awning with Deluxe Plus or Elite window awnings, made from the same vinyl Linen Fade or woven acrylic fabric and matching universal hardware. The Elite Window Awning offers a distinctive metal weathershield. Window awnings add privacy, protect furniture and draperies from sun damage, and allow open windows during gentle rains.

The Oasis door awning is totally enclosed in an all-metal case with four hardware colors—Polar White, Black, Satin or Champagne. Its 48-inch or 56-inch wide canopy provides cover for the door and side window. For power assist, the Oasis Elite model operates at the touch of a button inside the entryway, and also by remote control when used with a WeatherPro Power Awning. The Oasis Door Awning has six woven acrylic fabric color choices—Forest Green, Burgundy, Linen Tweed, Sapphire and Charcoal Grey, as well as a



9100 Power and Manual Awnings extend and retract with ease. They are available with vinyl or acrylic fabric and four hardware colors.

Polar White vinyl fabric choice.

The Dometic WeatherPro power awning is available in vinyl or acrylic and provides superior performance, utilizing a wind sensor that closes the awning automatically when it detects high, sustained winds, helping to prevent damage to the awning or coach. Exclusive Knee Action Design™ allows the awning to automatically flex in moderate wind, avoiding nuisance retractions. In the event of rain, a unique spring-arm mechanism automatically flexes to release accumulating water away from the door. Special hardware is available for mounting the awning over slideouts and on 5th wheels.

The Patty O'Room turns your RV patio awning into a comfortable screened-in enclosure that's free from flying insects and nearly doubles your living space. Setup is fast and simple. Or reduce the sun's intensity by more than 50 percent with the simple-to-set-up Patty O'Shade, which comes in a kit with all tie downs and stakes in 54-inch heights and 10- and 15-foot lengths. To stabilize your awning and provide the correct tension, the Optima System can be used in extended or retracted mode.

Most of today's Dometic awnings feature new double-sided Linen Fade vinyl fabric. The Linen Fade design is also available in Universal Replacement Fabrics that fit almost any awning, even non-Dometic models.

New Slidetoppers

To shield the top of RV slideout rooms, stain- and mildew-resistant vinyl SlideToppers extend automatically to keep water and debris from entering your RV when the slideout is retracted. SlideToppers reflect heat and light to help keep the interior cooler. They also enhance the look and value of your RV, and extend the life of seals and gaskets.

The Deluxe model features a vinyl weathershield. It comes in a complete kit that is quicker and easier to install than earlier versions and includes awning rail and mounting hardware.

The Elite model features a metal weathershield with wrap-around design that encloses the vinyl awning. Like the Deluxe model, it features an anti-billow mechanism and comes in a complete kit.



SlideToppers shield the tops of slideouts against moisture, debris and direct sunlight.



Americana Plus

Elite Series with ice maker

outside dimensions, thanks to advanced insulation technology. Available in 7 cubic foot and 9 cubic foot sizes, the self-locking door handles are designed for easy operation and security. Eye-level LED controls display fresh food temperatures for easy monitoring.

The Americana Plus refrigerator offers a contemporary exterior with electronic controls, automatic locking handles, and right- or left-swinging doors that open a full 180 degrees. With 6 cubic feet or 8 cubic feet of interior storage, it offers adjustable, removable shelving and door bins in refrigerator and freezer. A climate control system saves energy, and helps prevent condensation.

The Americana features solid steel-frame construction, eye-level automatic electronic controls and a two-year warranty—all at an affordable price. A versatile racking system offers a three-position freezer shelf and doors open 180 degrees. It's available in 6 cubic foot or 8 cubic foot sizes with positive door lock handles that ensure efficiency.

New Portable Freezers/Refrigerators

The new CFX Portable Freezers/Refrigerators utilize a fully hermetic WAECO compressor with integrated control electronics and low-voltage protection. They feature a detachable lid, USB charging port, interior light, soft-start and turbo cooler. They run on 120V AC or 12V/24V DC to freeze/cool from 50°F to -8°F.

New Portable Electric Cooler/Warmers

TropiCool cooler/warmers are great energy savers. As soon as the power is on, they cool or heat at full capacity to reach the desired temperature, then switch automatically to power-save mode.

TropiCool comes in 7-, 15-, 21- and 37-quart sizes, all featuring a thermo-electric box with detachable lid, magnetic lock, LED temperature readout and fold-away handle. They operate on 12V DC or can be plugged into 120V AC. They have a seven-stage temperature range for cooling and heating. Each unit can cool up to 48°F below ambient temperature and heat up to 150°F.



Dometic's portable ice makers produce ice in only minutes.



TropiCool cooler/warmers conserve energy and come in handy sizes.



Portable freezers/refrigerators add extra cold food storage to any RV.



Dometic offers standard, convection and over-the-range microwave ovens.

Refrigerators

Dometic invented absorption RV refrigeration in the 1950s and has been perfecting it ever since. Dometic refrigerators grace more RV kitchens than any other brand today, offering world class RV refrigeration.

The Elite 2+2 Refrigerator offers 15% improved performance and four doors. Unlike other dual-door refrigerators,

the 12.3 cubic foot capacity Elite features a divider-less freezer compartment for wall-to-wall cooling. With its upscale refinements such as through-the-door ice water dispenser and optional ice maker, the Elite lets you take home-style convenience and luxury with you wherever you go.

The New Generation refrigerator series increases storage space but not the

Portable Ice Makers

The Dometic Large Portable Ice Maker makes up to 33 lbs. of fresh, clean ice every 24 hours, with the first batch delivered in under 15 minutes. Choose from small, medium or large cubes.

Dometic's Compact Portable Ice Maker makes ice in less than 13 minutes and is perfect for stowing in an RV, boat or car. It produces 26 lbs. of ice every 24 hours, and a removable basket holds 1.8 lbs. of ice. Choose from small, medium or large cube sizes.

Microwaves

Quick, convenient microwave cooking is available from Dometic, with standard, convection and over-the-range sensor models. All offer touch pad controls, multi-stage cooking, one-touch reheat and popcorn buttons, plus other user-friendly features.

Dometic's DCM series microwave ovens are available in models that offer regular cook mode only, and models with grill and convection functions. All DCM series microwaves offer a 1.1 cubic foot capacity and 1,000 watts of cooking power. Ten adjustable power levels let you boil, reheat, defrost and more. These ovens have nine pre-sets for potatoes, popcorn, pizza, frozen entrees, beverages and re-heating. The control panel features a digital timer and clock with LED readout.

The over-the-range DOTR16B microwave oven has a 1.6 cubic foot capacity and 1,000 watts of cooking power. It features one-touch electronic controls for simple, reliable operation. The included turntable provides a sturdy, rotating surface for even cooking. Nine sensor cooking options automatically monitor food progress and adjust times and temperatures as needed for delicious results.

Air Conditioners

Dometic's line of rooftop air conditioners, heat pumps and RV climate control systems can help keep your trailer or motorhome comfortable all year round.

Dometic incorporates the most advanced technologies, including environmentally friendly 410A refrigerant.

The Brisk II Air Conditioner is the

result of two years of redesigning and re-engineering. One of the most popular and most imitated RV air conditioners, the Brisk II is stronger, lighter, smaller and more environmentally friendly than previous models.

The Brisk II uses its smart design, tighter specification allowances and improved materials to maximize air flow and performance. This newest RV air conditioner offers a 15% air flow increase and is 19% lighter than previous models, making it the smallest 13,500 BTU rooftop unit available. Fan motor sound-dampening brackets reduce noise and vibration, and larger air openings allow for improved air flow and cooling performance.



Choose a Brisk II air conditioner or heat pump to keep your RV comfortable year round.

The Brisk II Heat Pump offers 15,000 BTUs of heating and cooling from a single unit. The blower cycles automatically in cooling and heating modes, and operates on 115V, providing all-electric heat. It fits all standard 14-inch roof vent openings and works with ducted or air box installations.

The Penguin II low-profile RV rooftop air conditioner is a versatile cooling system that is thermostatically controlled with the Comfort Control Center II Thermostat. Its low profile is under 10 inches high, and the sleek, contemporary shroud reduces drag for improved mileage.

The Penguin II heat pump features both heating and cooling. Ideal for

ducted or non-ducted cooling systems, it is a perfect match for Dometic's exclusive QuietZone system. Both the Penguin air conditioner and heat pump use eco-friendly R410A refrigerant that releases heat more efficiently.

Dometic's Commercial Grade rooftop air conditioners are designed to overcome harsh road and weather conditions where continuous, powerful cooling is required. Strong, yet lightweight at just 91 pounds, its powder-coated base pan is 15% thicker than other models and strong L-brackets tie the motor, compressor and evaporator together for vibration-free operation.

Dometic's Single Zone LCD Thermostat puts total RV climate control at your fingertips. It operates automatically or manually. A large LCD display is easy to see and use even in low light, and allows for digital calibration for consistent room comfort. It is available in three models (cool/furnace, heat pump, heat strip) that work with any RV application.

New Washer/Dryer Combo

Dometic's Washer/Dryer Combo is ventless for easy installation and is quite efficient, using 20% less water than competing brands. The system offers an easy-to-read LCD for monitoring, programmable frequent-user settings, 13-pound capacity on wash and dry and cycle-timer display with complete alarm notification. An ergonomic door handle plus easy drainage and service access are other benefits. It features three separate compartments for pre-detergent and fabric softener.

For use in the Washer/Dryer Combo, Dometic offers a new Oxy Laundry Detergent specifically for high-efficiency machines. It is available in a 24-pack and features powerful stain removal in hot or cold water.

Finding a convenient place to hang and dry bath and dish towels in an RV can be a challenge. The convenient sizes of the Dri-Rac towel bars (12 and 17 inches) and shower bars (17 and 22 inches) increase hanging space from one bar to three bars. The durable nickel-satin finish features protective bumpers that won't mar surfaces. Dri-Rac is easy to install with no assembly required.



Dri-Rac quickly adds more drying space to kitchen or bathroom.

Dometic's new washer/dryer combo uses 20% less water than other washer/dryer units.

Dometic

New D-Line™ products are effective and eco-friendly!



Dometic 310 Series RV Toilet

Sanitation

Dometic offers a comprehensive range of RV toilets, all designed to save space in small bathrooms plus fast, easy installation. Made of high-quality materials, these long-lasting RV toilets offer the comfort and hygiene you expect.

The Dometic 320 series features an elongated, full-size enameled wood seat and deep ceramic bowl. The pressurized full-rim flush delivers a bowl-clearing rinse every time. An ergonomic one-direction foot pedal action results in easy, hands-free flushing. It's available in white or bone colors, and standard or low-profile height. A hand sprayer is optional.

The Dometic 310 series toilet features a full-sized, residential-type seat, a 100% vitreous ceramic bowl, easy foot-pedal operation and unique removable components that simplify winterization. The Dometic 310 uses revolutionary PowerFlush Technology, an extremely low-water-use flush technology that uses as little as 1 pint/.5 liter per flush. Hands-free foot pedal operation with adjustable water level offer even more convenience. The European styling comes in a white or bone color, standard or low profile height, with or without optional hand sprayer.

The new Dometic 300 ultra-light toilet offers powerful triple-jet rinse action that removes waste completely, plus an innovative drop away ball and valve system. These full-size, residential-style toilets feature efficient foot pedal operation with adjustable water level. It's available in white or bone colors, standard or low profile height, with or without optional hand sprayer. The 300 series toilets replace any standard-height RV toilet (two-bolt,

four-bolt and angled two-bolt styles) not installed on a raised platform. Some installations may require a Dometic floor flange adapter kit that is sold separately.

New Dometic D-Line™ Sanitation & Cleaning Products

Campers and outdoor enthusiasts no longer have to sacrifice effective cleaning and sanitation products in order to be eco-friendly. Dometic's new D-Line™ series of green products are named for their powerful impact as an RVer's "first defense" against dirt and odors. This powerful array of Dirt Defense cleaners and Odor Defense tank treatments and air fresheners are formaldehyde-free, campground-compatible, nature-friendly and professional strength.

The D-Line Premium Holding Tank Treatment comes in drop-in or liquid form, and includes additives that break down effluent to help tanks rinse cleaner. The 3 'n 1 Bowl Cleaner and Tank Treatment combines air freshener, bowl cleaner and tank treatment all in one. Non-toxic Clean 'n Green neutralizes waste holding tank odors, while Odor Eze Neutralizer is a powerful odor treatment for grey and black water tanks which does not use formaldehyde. D-Line Toilet Bowl & Seal Cleaner cleans, deodorizes, lubricates seals and valves plus leaves a fresh scent.

D-Line odor eliminators include

Odor Absorb Supreme that neutralizes the harshest odors for up to two months. Odor Absorb Supreme represents a breakthrough in odor-elimination technology. It absorbs and removes all odors, including formaldehyde, mildew, pet, smoke and fuel while leaving behind only a refreshing scent. Another bonus: There's no mess or clean up.

Odor Away permanently removes deep-down odors and is great for pet accidents, food spills and more. The liquid formula is safe for carpets and fabrics.

Dometic's new D™ Air Freshener hanging strips are extra-long-lasting, with deep ridges that provide more surface area. The strips hang virtually anywhere thanks to the included suction cups. Six fresh fragrances are available.

Other D-Line products include Ultra Enviro-Soft toilet tissue, Fresh 'N Up Moist Towelettes and an RV Essentials Kit with four trial sizes of tissue, 3 'n 1 Bowl Cleaner, Premium Holding Tank Treatment liquid and one Citrus Air Freshener.

D-Line RV Cleaning products include the new RV Wash 'N Wax Cleaner, a professional strength, multi-purpose wash formula. It cleans and polishes the vehicle and removes grime, grease, bugs and more, plus it offers spot-free drying.

Dometic's new RV Roof Cleaner and Sealer work in combination to provide all-weather protection, preventing drying, cracking and oxidation, and repelling dirt and rain. The RV Roof Sealer leaves a silky, UV-resistant finish. Both are available in a convenient twin pack pail.

Ultra Red Cleaner is a super-concentrated, multi-purpose cleaner that removes built-up grime, grease, black streaks, dirt and road film, leaving no filmy residue. It's great for power washing and won't harm plants.

Look for a full selection of Dometic products at Camping World and other authorized dealers. For more information about Dometic products, visit dometic.com.

Camping World offers RVers a tremendous value on Dometic products, with everyday savings for Good Sam Club members. New for 2014, Camping World offers Good Sam members \$39 installation on products like Dometic air conditioners, refrigerators and awnings, **PLUS A BEST INSTALLED PRICE GUARANTEE.** Camping World provides a large selection of Dometic products in SuperCenters, in catalogs and online at CampingWorld.com.

First-Class B's

by Bob Ashley

In a market dominated by the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter, new chassis players emerge, adding more choices in floorplans, powertrains and price

The Class B motorhome market changed for 2014 with two new European-based platforms: the ProMaster van from Chrysler's Ram truck division and the Ford Transit van. Both will challenge the decade-long market supremacy of the diesel-powered Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis, which, as an RV platform, outsold the domestic Chevy Express van by more than two-to-one in 2012. The

Chevy Express has been the Sprinter's primary competitor in the RV market since Ford mothballed the popular Ford E-series van in 2012.

Camper van builders are quickly adapting. Winnebago Industries got a jump on the market with the introduction of the long-anticipated Travato van camper on the Ram ProMaster chassis, while others have plans to add the 2015 Ford Transit to their stable.

The suddenly increased competition in the Class B market portends well for consumers. More chassis mean more choices with regard to price, floorplans and powerplants.

Horsepower and gross vehicle weight ratings (GVWR) for Ford's unibody Transit haven't been established yet, but the chassis will be equipped with a V-6 gas or 3.2-liter diesel engine with wheelbases from 130 to 147 inches.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURERS

The Ram ProMaster, powered by a 280-horsepower 3.6-liter gasoline engine, features high- and low-roof models with a GVWR of 9,350 pounds and wheelbases up to 159 inches, while the Chevy Express provides a GVWR up to 9,600 pounds with a 324-horsepower 6.2-liter powerplant.

Although new to North America, both the ProMaster, based on the Fiat Ducato, and the Ford Transit, upfitted for the U.S. market, have long been used in Europe as motorhome and commercial van platforms.

"Transit has been available in Europe for more than 40 years," said Craig Hall, Ford Motor Company's

specialty vehicle marketing manager. "It's not a new vehicle, per se."

Hall says the Transit — not to be confused with the smaller Transit Connect — will be available in several lengths, roof heights and weight ratings. "Fuel prices are going up, and the consumer wants better fuel mileage, which the Transit will provide," he said.

The Ram ProMaster also has a long history. "The ProMaster is a proven platform," said Joe Benson, head of Ram commercial trucks. "It's been on the European market for over 30 years, and 4.5 million have been sold worldwide. Two out of every three

RV owners [in Europe] have chosen the Ducato on the Fiat platform."

Meanwhile, the Class B king, Mercedes-Benz, isn't sitting still. The luxury European manufacturer modified the 2014 Sprinter chassis with a redesigned front end and new four-cylinder diesel engine that is expected to get 15 to 18 percent better fuel economy. Most van camper manufacturers that build on the Sprinter chassis will make the change to the new chassis in the middle of their 2014 model year.

Here's a look at what some prominent B-van manufacturers are offering this year, plus a couple of "B-plus" motorhomes.



Advanced RV

RVers travel to Advanced RV in Willoughby, Ohio, to order custom Class B vans to their specifications. Two models are built on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 3500 chassis: the 22-foot Ocean and 24-foot Ocean One. Buyers can order features ranging from a built-in desk for on-the-road office work to climate-controlled kennels for show dogs to rear storage for bicycles. Although highly customizable, each van comes standard with hardwood cabinetry, handcrafted leather upholstery, granite countertops, LED lighting and a convertible electric sofa bed (fixed double or twin beds are optional, as are bunkbeds). Upscale features include a diesel-fired furnace, on-demand hot water, heated floors, insulated curtains, handrails, multiple batteries, active air suspension and sound insulation. An optional Independence Package comes with two solar panels to charge a set of lithium-ion batteries that also can be charged by a shore connection or through an optional generator attached to the engine. Production time typically runs from five to 14 weeks, depending on the level of personalization. Retail prices start at about \$137,000.

440-283-0405, www.advanced-rv.com

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Airstream

Jackson Center, Ohio-based Airstream's Interstate Class B has been the best-selling van camper brand for the past three years and will be mounted on the 2014 Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis with a standard 161-horsepower six-cylinder diesel engine by the time you read this. Available in seven 22- and 24-foot floorplans on standard and extended Sprinter chassis, the Interstate has been upgraded with a larger TV, Alcoa Dura-Bright aluminum wheels, an enhanced navigation system and Xenon headlights with automatic rain-sensing washers. Other standards include Corian countertops and pedestal tables, high-gloss laminate cabinets, power rear sofas or twin beds, Ultraleather seating and adjustable LED lighting. MSRP starts at \$137,364.

877-596-6111, www.airstream.com



Great West Van Conversions

Great West Van Conversions in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, builds three van campers: the Legend, Legend SE and Legend XE, all built on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter diesel platform with a GVWR of 11,030 pounds. Two floorplans — one with a trifold rear bed, the other with twin beds — are available in all three models. The Legend and upgraded Legend SE are 22 feet, while the Legend XE is 24 feet and offers more living space, a longer bed and four coach batteries. Both the Legend SE and XE are equipped with hydronic heating/hot water, along with a standard 85-watt solar panel. All models feature solid wood cabinets, recessed LED lighting, Avonite countertops and laminate hardwood-look floors. Base MSRPs: Legend, \$110,000; Legend SE, \$120,000; Legend EX, \$128,000.

888-498-8267, www.greatwestvans.com

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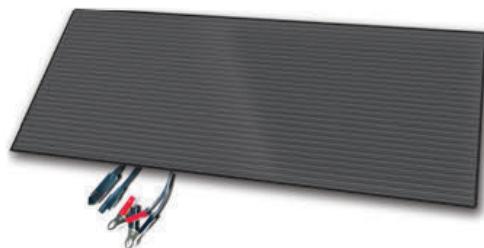
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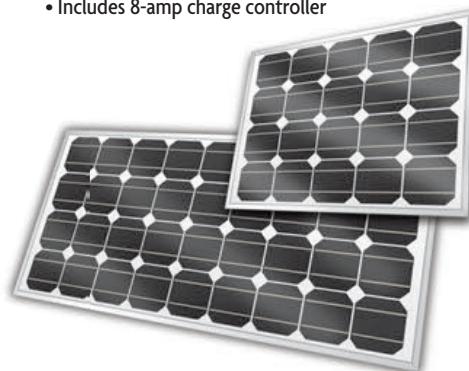
Nature Power Solar Battery Maintainers & Trickle Chargers

- Works in all weather conditions
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- Includes battery clamps, DC plug and mounting hardware



Nature Power Solar Battery Charger Kit

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- Link up to 6 panels for more output
- Includes 8-amp charge controller



Nature Power High Output Solar Battery Charger

- Works best in sunny climates
- Charges all 12-volt batteries including deep cycle
- Available in up to 80 watts/5.3 amps and 130 watts/8.7 amps ratings
- Includes wiring and mounting hardware



Nature Power Solar Battery Charge Controllers

- Prevent over-charging or discharging
- Reduces maintenance and extends battery life
- Models available in up to 420 watts/28 amps rating
- Works with all 12-volt batteries including deep cycle

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First-Class B's



Leisure Travel Vans

Winkler, Manitoba, Canada-based Leisure Travel Vans has designed a driver-side slideout in the Free Spirit FS22SS Class B, built on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis with a GVWR of 11,030 pounds. The manufacturer gives the buyer the option of a four- or six-cylinder diesel engine with the 2014 Sprinter chassis. New to the 22-foot 9-inch Free Spirit is an electric convertible sofa, roof trim with integrated power awning and a 4.8-cubic-foot refrigerator. The FS22SS, one of two Free Spirit floorplans, takes a cue from European designers with curved cabinets and a self-contained lavatory. Standards include contoured Corian countertops, radius windows and a powered patio awning. Base MSRP: \$113,815.

877-992-9906, www.leisurevans.com



Pleasure-Way Industries

Pleasure-Way offers Class B's on two platforms: the 19½-foot Ascent and 22-foot 9-inch dual-wheel Plateau on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter and the 20½-foot Lector on the Chevy 3500 Express. The GVWR on the Ascent is 8,500 pounds, 11,030 pounds on the Plateau and 9,600 pounds with a 320-horsepower gas engine on the Lector. Pleasure-Way has started to build on the 2014 Mercedes-Benz Sprinter equipped with a four-cylinder diesel engine. Standard features include a private bath and shower, maple cabinets, Corian countertops, a stainless-steel sink, and a two-burner cooktop and stove. Pleasure-Way RVs come with a five-year/60,000-mile limited warranty. Base MSRPs: Lector, \$88,855; Ascent, \$110,500; Plateau, \$123,500.

800-364-0189

www.pleasureway.com





Roadtrek Motorhomes

This year Roadtrek Motorhomes of Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, introduced the 22-foot CS-Adventurous series built on the Sprinter dual-wheel chassis with a GVWR of 11,030 pounds. The floorplan is versatile with three captain's chairs up front and a rear convertible sofa or twin beds, either of which can be converted into a king-size sleeping platform. The front and rear sleeping areas allow two people to get up and go to bed at different times without disturbing each other. Features include frameless windows, marine toilets, engineered granite countertops, cherry cabinet doors and heavy-duty vinyl flooring. An optional E-Trek package allows the motorhome to be operated off the grid with an engine-mounted 3,500-watt AC generator, eight 6-volt solar-charged AGM batteries and an Alde comfort heating system that includes hot water. Base MSRP: \$115,960. **888-762-3873, www.roadtrek.com**



Winnebago Industries

Winnebago Industries, long an innovator in the Class B market, introduced the Travato motorhome this year, assembled on the Ram ProMaster chassis with a GVWR of 9,350 pounds. The 21-foot, front-wheel-drive Travato from the Forest City, Iowa, manufacturer is equipped with a 280-horsepower V-6 gasoline engine that gets an estimated 15 to 18 MPG. With side walls that are more vertical than Winnebago's Sprinter-based Era Class B, the Travato provides 4 inches more shoulder room and offers features such as a soft vinyl ceiling, LED interior lights, shower, powered patio awning, laminate countertops, two-burner range and a refrigerator with a removable freezer unit. MSRP: \$84,039. **641-585-3535, www.winnebagoind.com**

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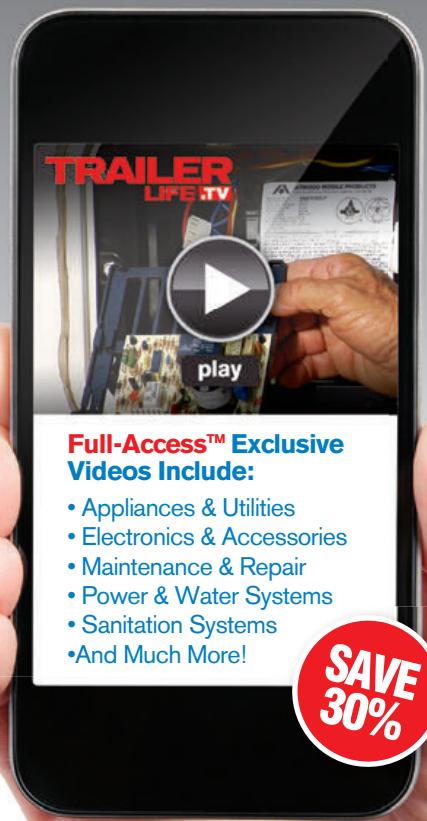
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Bigger Than B's

Looking to go a little larger than a Class B?
Downsized Class C's may fit the bill article by Chris Hemer



Coach House

There are a lot of motorhome manufacturers out there, but few can boast as many so-called B-plus motorhomes as Coach House. In fact, all Coach House makes are motorhomes based on cutaway Class C platforms in two product lines: Platinum, based on a Ford chassis, and Platinum II, built on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter. Shown here is the company's Platinum II 240 model, with a patented one-piece body with carbon-fiber reinforcement. It's available with full-body paint in three grades: Basic, Deluxe and Premier. Finding a floorplan that suits your needs in a small coach can sometimes be a challenge, but not with Coach House. The 240 is available in 10 floorplans. And if you need more breathing room, go with the 240XL. This model also comes in 10 floorplans, each with a living room slideout. Base MSRP: \$129,900. **800-235-0984, www.coachhousesrv.com**



Phoenix USA

Phoenix Cruiser is unique in that it sells its luxurious B-plus motorhomes directly to the public from its factory in Elkhart, Indiana. Based on the Ford E-Series Class C chassis in gas or diesel, 2WD or 4WD, Phoenix Cruiser motorhomes are all about options — nine floorplans are available, the interior comes in four different colors with cherry or maple cabinetry, and there are 12 optional paint selections. Standard interior features include day/night shades, solid wood tables and solid-surface countertops. The company even offers some customization and can build to order. Options include a 4-kilowatt generator, 31-inch LCD front television, leveling jacks, surround sound with a Blu-ray player, leather seating, power awning, wood flooring and more. MSRP: Varies, depending on stock on hand. **877-754-8535, www.phoenixusarv.com**



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MSRP \$371,702

Your Price

\$282,440

Savings \$89,262



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Newmar Canyon Star 3610



MSRP \$159,837

Your Price

\$129,670

Savings \$30,167

Ford F-53 Chassis, 5.5K watt Onan generator, Flexsteel furniture, stainless steel accents.



Newmar Ventana 3433



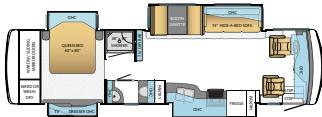
MSRP \$215,693

Your Price

\$169,995

Savings \$45,698

400HP ISL Cummins Diesel, Comfort Drive steering, 8K Watt Onan generator.



*All Units Are 2013 Unless Otherwise Noted.

Newmar Dutch Star 4344



MSRP \$380,937

Your Price

\$289,186

Savings \$91,751

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Champion 2000W Inverter Cover



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- Sound level 58 dBA at 23'
- Weight 84 lbs.

Champion 3100W Inverter Cover



Champion 9500/7500 Watt Generator, CARB Compliant Model

- 9500 starting watts, 7500 rated watts
- Electric and recoil start
- Fuel capacity 5.9 gallons
- 10" Never Flat Wheels
- QuickDrain™ oil draining system
- 8 running hours at 50% load
- 74 dBA at 23'
- Weight 224 lbs.

Champion 9500/7500 Watt Cover



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- 3.8 gallon fuel capacity
- Sound level 68 dBA at 23'
- Weight 134 lbs.
- 8" Never-flat wheels



Champion 4000/3500 Watt Generator, 49 State

- 20-amp/120-volt duplex, 30-amp/120-volt twistlock, 30-amp/120-volt RV receptacles
- 4000 starting watts, 3500 rated watts
- Single cylinder four-stroke 196 cc air cooled engine
- Runs 12 hours at 50% load on 4-gallon tank of gas
- 68 dB at 23'
- Recoil start
- Weight 108 lbs.

Champion 4000/3500 Watt Generator, CARB Compliant Model

Champion 4000/3500 Watt Generator Cover



Portable Clean Energy

The ArkPak battery-pack system has a built-in charger and power outputs that can hold a 12-volt battery of up to 130-amp-hours storage capacity. According to the company, the ArkPak is the only system in the world with a built-in charger and inverter where the battery is removable and replaceable. As such, the ArkPak can accommodate hundreds of different deep-cycle lead-acid batteries Group 31 or smaller. The ArkPak includes a 6-amp, seven-stage battery smart-charging and conditioning system with multiple power outlets (both 12-volt DC and 120-volt AC), Anderson plugs that are compatible with many solar systems and direct connections to the battery via 100-amp external terminals. Solar panels (pictured) not included.

MSRP: \$399

630-723-0072, www.arkportablepower.com

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Up a Creek with a Paddle

Sea Eagle recently added the NeedleNose NN126 to its line of inflatable stand-up paddleboards (SUPs). This 12-foot 6-inch tourer features an advanced shape that significantly reduces drag, friction and the unwanted effects of the wind, according to the company. Made with a double-layer, 1,000-denier high-pressure reinforced core with quadruple overlapping seams, the NN126 features an extra reinforcement layer that runs the entire length of the rails to provide additional longitudinal rigidity. Weighing in at only 25 pounds and inflating in less than 10 minutes, the NN126 fits in a backpack carrying case (included), ready to be rapidly deployed at a moment's notice. The SUP also comes with a paddle and pump.

MSRP: \$999 to \$1,339

800-748-8066, www.seaeagle.com

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Recording Genius

With all the distracted drivers out there, it has become even more important to protect yourself legally with a dashboard camera. Genius brand has introduced its new DVR-FHD650 Vehicle Recorder, which captures a full view of the road in high definition. The 127-degree wide-angle lens has an f/2.0 aperture for brilliant and clear recording, even in low light, according to the company. The T-buckle design makes it easy to install, and the recorder powers up through your vehicle's cigarette lighter port whenever you start the engine. The DVR-FHD650 uses microSDHC cards up to 32GB for long recording times and includes a 2.4-inch LCD screen, a 500-milliamp-hour lithium-ion battery and a resolution of 1920 x 1080m at 30 frames per second or 1280 x 720m at 60 FPS.

MSRP: \$169.99 www.amazon.com Circle 154 on Reader Service Card





A New Leash on Life

Safely securing your dog in an RV park can sometimes be a challenge, but the innovative 3Sixty Fun leash tie-out makes it easy. Simply push the steel spiral stake into the ground and turn the integral handles to provide a rigid anchor point capable of securing small to midsize pets up to 55 pounds, according to the company. The easy-glide pull mechanism allows the leash cord to smoothly extend and retract via a 360-degree swivel case as your dog moves around, preventing him or her from becoming tangled. 3Sixty Fun is 19 inches tall, and the leash cord measures 16 feet when fully extended.

MSRP: \$39.99 877-688-3647, www.poochie-pets.net Circle 155 on Reader Service Card



Easy RV Wash

Washing an RV is a time-consuming task, and it's often not even possible at a campground. When all you need is a quick touch-up, Meguiar's offers its new Rinse Free Wash-N-Wax, specifically formulated for RV surfaces. The product is designed to lift away dirt and grime, leaving behind a high-gloss layer of wax with one spray, according to the company. The product can be applied without water on wet or dry surfaces — just spray on and wipe off with a microfiber towel. The hydrophobic formula leaves a water-beading, high-gloss finish. It's said to be safe for use on glass, plastic, instrument panels, polished metals, fiberglass, gelcoat and clearcoat.

MSRP: \$19.95 888-888-3143, www.meguiarsdirect.com Circle 156 on Reader Service Card



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Elite® 25K

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Titan® 20K

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- 25K model - 25,000 lbs. gross / 6,250 lbs. pin weight capacities / 4° side-to-side / 14" to 16-1/2" vertical adjustment
- 18K model - 18,000 lbs. gross / 4,500 lbs. pin weight capacities / 4° side-to-side / 14" to 18" vertical adjustment
- Utilizes custom under-bed rail kits (sold separately)
- Wider 9" (vs. 6") king pin funnel
- Strong, high capacity forged single jaw design
- Self-latching jaw & king pin indicator
- Wider footprint for increased stability
- Lockable extended length handle (lock sold separately)
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Reese® once again revolutionizes the fifth wheel the new Titan® 16K and 20K. Reese® remains unmatched in safety, reliability and performance. Optional slider available for additional turning clearance.

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- 20K model - 20,000 lbs. gross / 5,000 lbs. pin weight capacities
- Vertical height adjustment from 14" to 18"
- Double jaw mechanism designed for longer wear, with improved tolerances, eliminating chucking in jaw system
- Improved head funneling for king pin to latch
- Improved life and wear with added grease points
- Requires rails & installation kit (sold separately)
- SAE J2638 compliant
- Sidewinder compatible



Reese® Elite™ 18K with a slider allows additional turning clearance and reduces opportunities for truck/trailer damage especially in a short bed or extended cab short bed pickup truck.



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Headers and Lower-Restriction Exhausts

Exhaust systems have traditionally been among the first things would-be hot-rodders and other performance enthusiasts modify. It's common to see neophytes install loud mufflers on their vehicles, which often have huge outlets but small-diameter stock inlets. This does little — other than annoy the neighbors — but many folks equate louder with more powerful. The most restrictive portion of the system, just like a kink in a hose, controls the maximum flow.

Most stock exhaust manifolds are made from cast iron. They fit into tight locations in today's crowded engine compartments and contain noise well. Their thick walls also don't rust through easily, which helps them last a long time. But cast-iron manifolds are heavy, tend to crack from heat cycling and are quite restrictive to flow. They also don't allow effective tuning (more about that later).

Tubular steel exhaust headers are typically lighter than cast-iron manifolds, and their increased length allows less-restrictive bends. Individual tubes can be matched for length, which has the potential to further increase power.

For the sake of understanding exhausts, it's helpful to think of an engine as essentially an air pump, which also happens to have controlled explosions inside it. The easier air flows through, the more power the engine can potentially produce (within certain physical limitations).

Volumetric efficiency is a measure of how effectively an engine pumps and flows air. For example, if a 300-cubic-inch (5-liter) displacement engine manages to flow exactly that amount of air volume, it is considered to have a volumetric efficiency of 100 percent. Most naturally aspirated engines don't reach 100 percent, but that's the goal.

Reducing back pressure has several benefits. It lowers temperatures significantly in and downstream of the combustion chambers. This reduces wear and thermal stress on the engine and can even reduce the octane requirement or tendency to detonate.

At the start of the exhaust stroke, the exhaust valve opens, and the piston pushes exhaust gases out of the cylinder through the exhaust port. Any resistance that the piston must push against to move exhaust gases out is power that is wasted. This is known as pumping loss.

But there is more. The greater the back pressure, the more residual exhaust gases remain in the cylinder. These heat up the incoming air-fuel charge and reduce the amount of fresh charge that can enter for the next power stroke.

With stock exhaust manifolds, the gases coming out of one cylinder can interfere with flow from adjacent cylinders. With custom headers, each

cylinder gets its own exhaust pipe, called a primary tube. These tubes join into a larger pipe downstream, which is called a collector.

Making primary tubes the same length ensures that each cylinder's exhaust gases reach the collector spaced equally apart in the firing order, minimizing back pressure. In fact, with certain designs, the outgoing gases tend to help draw out the next cylinder's exhaust. This is known as scavenging. It occurs because gases have momentum, and right after a pulse of exhaust gas goes through the pipe, lower pressure occurs behind it.

Smaller primary tube diameters create good low- and midrange torque but drop off at the top. Larger primary header tubes boost high-RPM power at the expense of low-speed torque. Primary tube diameter determines flow rate (gas velocity) and consequently affects engine output. At the engine's torque peak, the mean flow velocity is about 240 feet per second.

Changing primary tube length also affects the amount of torque produced above and below the peak-torque RPM. For instance, shorter primary tubes move torque above the peak and may shift the RPM at which the peak torque occurs. Lengthening the primary tubes tends to boost torque in the RPM range



A properly designed aftermarket exhaust system can increase power and improve fuel economy.

below peak torque, which is preferred for heavy vehicles and towing.

Modern road vehicles are designed to meet air-pollution regulations, and most are subject to rules limiting modifications. Gasoline engines have oxygen sensors and pre-catalysts in the front of the exhaust system, followed by catalytic converters. These must be retained. However, aftermarket rear sections of the exhaust from the catalytic converter back (often called "cat-back" systems) are typically free of emission-control devices and therefore generally exempt from air-quality regulations. However, if they are louder than stock, they may be subject to local noise regulations.

The header's primary tube should be mandrel bent, and the larger the radius, the better. Hangers should be heavy duty and use the stock locations for convenience.

Mufflers don't have to be extremely loud to be less restrictive. However, they do need to have a large interior

volume to flow well and be quiet. Well-designed systems will have a nice sound without being excessively loud. Some poorly designed systems produce annoying droning throughout the vehicle interior at certain RPM and loads.

Later model diesel engines use exhaust-gas recirculation, diesel particulate filters and selective catalytic reduction (SCR) to control emissions. In SCR systems, diesel exhaust fluid (DEF) is stored onboard the vehicle and injected into the exhaust gases by a metering system. An electronic control unit (ECU) controls the injection rate based on variables such as engine temperature and RPM.

Disabling or removing these components may be illegal and may affect the warranty. Therefore, before purchase, check with the exhaust-system manufacturer regarding legality of installation in your area.

Exhaust systems and components that have a California Air Resources Board Executive Order number are

legal for use in all 50 states in their designated application.

Many headers are made from regular steel tubing and therefore subject to surface rusting and even rust perforation. To protect them, you may elect to use a special high-temperature paint or have them treated to a ceramic or other high-tech coating. If you drive in wet or snowy climates or plan to keep your tow vehicle for a long time, you may consider stainless-steel headers and/or a cat-back system, which offer greater resistance to oxidation. They're a bigger investment but may be worth it in the long run.

Both diesel and gasoline engines benefit from efficient, properly matched exhaust systems with the correct diameter and length tubing for the application. Both power and fuel economy can be increased. The amount of increased horsepower, torque and fuel-economy gains vary between vehicles and drivers but typically amount to at least several percentage points and

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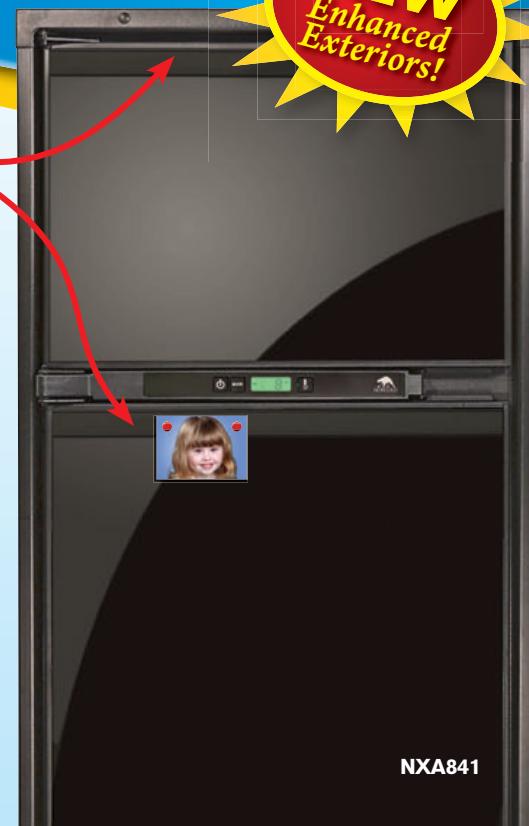
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The Pressure Is On

For RV owners, tire safety is a big concern. The nVision monitoring system makes tire kicking – and manual checking – a thing of the past

Safety is important to all RVers, and maintaining proper tire pressure should remain a high priority when following any pre-trek checklist. Quite often, tire-related problems can lead to failure and collateral damage that results in expensive repairs. And don't forget about the inconvenience of trip interruptions that can quickly spoil a vacation.

One of the best ways to avoid frustrations on the road is to be on top of your RV and tow vehicle's tire pressures, constantly monitoring and adjusting as necessary. Nowadays, the easiest way to keep track of tire pressure lies in the hands of modern electronics.

Hopkins Manufacturing, a big supplier to the automotive aftermarket industry, combines technology and simplicity in the nVision tire pressure monitoring system (TPMS). The nVision TPMS consists of a clamshell monitor measuring approximately 4 x 4 inches — with an actual viewing size of about 3.25 inches — that contains all of the programming buttons and rests on a round nonskid pad in the cockpit.

Supplying information signals to the monitor are cylindrical, plastic-encased tire-pressure sensors designed for quick installation on up to 24 wheels. Obviously, that's way more than the average person will use for



(Above left) Tire pressure sensors are simply screwed onto the valve stems in the wheel. The extra weight (¾ ounce) should not affect wheel balance for most RV tires. **(Above right)** The Quick-Set installation cord uses a 9-volt battery to power the base unit while syncing sensors — so you don't have to run in and out of the cab during the process.

RV purposes, but the system is designed to store information in its memory for up to four vehicles. That makes the nVision versatile and convenient to move from vehicle to vehicle.

Powering up the monitor is a 6-foot cord with a 12-volt DC power connector that goes into standard issue automotive ports in the dash. Enclosed in the kit is a Quick-Set installation cord that uses a 9-volt battery (not supplied) to power the monitor so it can



PRESSURE MONITORING » On-screen icons and individual programming allow drivers to keep constant tabs on tire pressure and temperature.

DIFFICULTY	1 2 3 4 5
TIME TO COMPLETE	1 HOUR
TOOLS NEEDED	NONE

be moved to each tire when installing the sensors to set the programming.

Installation of the TPMS is straightforward and can be accomplished easily, regardless of your mechanical skill or knowledge. Before doing anything else, remove all valve caps from the wheel stems and inflate the tires to the correct pressure. This should be done when the tires are cold.

The pivoting antenna is then attached to the monitor, and the 9-volt Quick-Set adapter is plugged into the monitor. Without the Quick-Set cord, you'll have to go back and forth from each tire to the tow vehicle cab while programming the monitor.

Once the monitor is on, it should already be in Define mode to allow the correct tire configuration to be selected; if not, there's a button to start that process. Ten possible configurations will show up on the screen. Arrow buttons are used to scroll through the icons, and the OK button confirms the selection.

Once the configurations are established, the sensors are installed. When the tire position flashes, a wheel sensor is screwed onto the valve stem in a corresponding order, based on the specific setup choice, following a clockwise pattern. To finish this step, simply wait until the screen has confirmed the correct tire pressure and press OK. Continue to follow the prompts on the screen until all tires are recognized by the system.

From here, the only thing left to do is to spend a few minutes selecting and programming the vehicle position mode for your application. Of the four memory choices, it's recommended to use No. 1 and 2 for a tow vehicle and trailer.

Typical operation of the TPMS is intuitive, once all the initial programming has been set, and will require no changes unless desired. Changes can be made using the monitor's navigation controls, following the easily understandable owner's manual.

There's a fairly wide spectrum for setting options, and the screen displays a host of informational icons as well as real-time tire pressures.

Since the monitor is on the bulky side and not very high-tech looking, users will probably keep it closed most of the time. Lights in the front portion of the housing and signal tones notify the driver when tire pressure is at the preset values and when pressure dips 12.5 percent or 25 percent lower than baseline. The device will also alert the driver of high pressure (24 percent higher than baseline), high temperature (176 degrees Fahrenheit or hotter), if a sensor is missing and when the battery level is low. Those who prefer to keep the monitor open to view the screen will also find icons that work in conjunction with the warning lights. Of course, the only way to monitor exact tire pressure is to leave the screen open.

The nVision can be set to a specific memory position — for example,

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CAMCO

when using the monitor in the tow vehicle only. The company also recommends that the monitor be left on at all times, unless the vehicle is placed in storage for more than one month. Once the unit is turned off, it will have to reestablish the RF connections, which can take around five minutes. It draws only 25 milliamperes of power, which is still a parasitic drain but one that can usually be handled by starting batteries in good condition within the recommended time frame.

Four sensors are included with the kit, and extras are available in packs of two. They weigh $\frac{2}{3}$ ounce, which should not affect tire balance for most RV tires. Tires on smaller trailers might require counterbalancing with the use of a small wheel weight. While the system is pretty much maintenance-free, the sensor batteries are not serviceable, which means they will need to be replaced in time — usually at around four years. That presents an additional expense down the road,



Sticky pad attaches to the bottom of the base unit so it can be placed on a center console or dash without the use of fasteners. Power cable is plugged into 12-volt DC accessory port.

since a pair sells for around \$90. The basic kit, with four sensors, can be found online priced in the neighborhood of \$260.

RVers seeking a more modern way of maintaining steady tire pressures should find nVision's TPMS a good

way to cover the essentials without overwhelming amounts of information or an involved installation procedure. Sure beats kicking tires. 🚗

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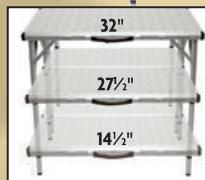


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AXLE-HUB TEMPERATURE?

Q I enjoyed Bill and Jenn Gehr's *Rolling & Stopping* article in the May issue. Because I travel with an infrared temperature gun, I often take the temperature of the axle hubs, tires, grass, dogs, etc. after towing my trailer for a while — at a rest stop, for example. The problem with this data is that I have no idea what the temperature of the axle hubs should be on average, and the article didn't provide the data. I know that if you have the bearings tightened too much, they will run hot, but what is too hot?

After a trip last summer, the temperature was 185 degrees Fahrenheit on one side and 165 degrees on the other. I asked the question at the local "table of knowledge" (the café with a bunch of old guys), but no one had any idea what the average axle hub temperature should be. One guy asked if the hot side was in the sun. As it turned out, the hot side had been on the sun side for the last two hours of towing.

So the question is, what should the average axle hub temperature be after towing for a while?

Charlie Moore, Mokelumne Hill, California

A Great question, Charlie. That 165- to- 185-degree range you noted is right in the ballpark for normal operating wheel-bearing temperature for a typical RV. The higher temps could have indeed been caused by being on the sunny side, and if the road had a high crown, a slight shift in trailer weight toward the lower side of the road



could have warmed those bearings a bit more.

If you measure the brake drum temperature at the outer edge of the braking surface, you can likely find temperatures ranging from 150 to 400 degrees, depending on the level of braking prior to your stop-and-inspect process. Some of that heat can transfer inward toward the hub and cause temporarily elevated hub temperatures, so be aware of that effect when you check.

The infrared thermometer is most useful for checking the hubs and bearing temperatures against each other. As long as all are fairly consistent, you're in good shape, but if one hub is running significantly hotter than the others, it could mean it's time for a bearing inspection and service. Likewise, if one brake drum is much cooler than the others, it could mean that brake is defective, not being applied and in need of repair. — **Jeff Johnston**

AUXILIARY FUEL-TANK USE

Q I am thinking of installing an auxiliary fuel tank in my 2013 Chevrolet Silverado 2500 diesel pickup. Between vacation trips, the truck is used occasionally. I always put some Power Service Diesel Kleen in the fuel tank and keep it full during these times. Power Service indicates on the label that Diesel Kleen acts as a fuel stabilizer, among other benefits. What actions or maintenance would be necessary to avoid any fuel problems if the auxiliary

tank is not kept full between trips? I am trying to avoid driving around town with a full load of fuel, which would be upward of 100 gallons between the truck fuel tank and an auxiliary tank.

Ron Spence, Tryon, North Carolina

A You didn't mention where you live or how long the truck sits between uses, Ron, but the best solution is probably still to leave the auxiliary tank full, even if you'd prefer not to. The more air in the tank, the more condensation can

occur — especially in humid climates such as yours. Diesel is also prone to contamination if there is enough air to support the formation of bacteria. A full tank treated with diesel fuel stabilizer will keep the fuel in good condition for several months at a time. Carrying around more than 600 extra pounds may not be ideal, but it's a compromise you're going to have to make if you want the convenience of fewer fuel stops. — **J.J.**

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.

FINDING THE STUDS

Q We recently bought a new Creek Side travel trailer. This trailer has aluminum square-tube superstructure framing. We don't like the factory-installed medicine cabinet, and I would like to put in a larger new one. How can

I find the aluminum studs so I can attach the mounting screws to them? The trailer has a fiberglass exterior, and the interior walls are rigid.

Jim Brookman, Bremerton, Washington

A Since you're interested in finding the studs, Jim, I would have to assume that the medicine cabinet is mounted to an outer wall. The simplest answer is to remove the old cabinet, use it as a template, then remount the new cabinet in the same location (if it will fit), as the existing holes probably go into studs already. Failing that, it's possible that a stud sensor sold for residential use might work for locating the aluminum frame elements, but we haven't tried one, so we can't say for sure. A stud sensor is designed for a typical sheetrock wall with wood studs, so how it works with fiberglass, wood paneling and aluminum studs is a good question.

Alternatively, you could ask the manufacturer for a printout of the wall-framing diagram for the trailer, and although manufacturers typically will not hand out such data, it can't hurt to ask.

You can also look at the trailer's exterior. Use the furnace to warm up the trailer interior on a chilly morning when there's condensation on the outside of the trailer. Chances are good you may see a crosshatch pattern on the exterior that indicates where the aluminum studs are located. The studs transfer heat from the interior directly to the fiberglass skin, and that creates warm spots where the condensation evaporates. The adjacent areas with insulation remain cooler, and the condensation remains in place. Shoot reference photos and use a tape measure to locate the studs close to known exterior and interior benchmarks such as the edge of a window. Use those measurements from outside to position the studs inside, and you can mount your cabinets or other components with confidence. — J.J.

SLIDEOUT SUPPORTS

Q I have a 2008 Keystone Montana fifth-wheel with four slideouts. I have seen slideout supports for sale at RV stores, and I understand from

salespeople that these help stabilize and support the slideouts. However, I have also been told that the supports could damage the slideouts. One of my Montana's slideouts is a large one that includes the sofa and dining area. We are full-timers and are sometimes in a particular resort for four to six months and travel the West Coast with stays up to three weeks the rest of the year. Are these supports a good investment for this type of living?

Walt and Pam MacQueston, Tigard, Oregon

A Slideout supports are used successfully on slideout rooms of all types. And perhaps "support" is a bit of a misnomer because these extra braces are there to help steady the unit and keep the fully extended slideout from causing the RV to rock when someone sits on the couch, dinette or elsewhere in the slideout. They don't technically support the slideout, as that's done by the mechanism built into the unit. If you installed the aftermarket supports

and cranked them too tight, it could be possible to damage something, but they work fine when used according to the manufacturer's directions. — J.J.

WALL WARPING

Q We purchased a 2013 Keystone Cougar 279RKSWE fifth-wheel in March 2013. In September 2013, the trailer was winterized and covered with an RV cover. We uncovered it in March of this year and discovered the rear exterior wall is warped. We have spoken with various manufacturers of other brands as well as repair facilities about this issue. They all said that this situation is not normal. However, when we brought it to the dealer, we were told the exterior rear wall is a floating panel and this is to be expected. When we winterized it in September, it was not warped. Is this a manufacturer's problem or is this a normal occurrence?

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A Unlike the side walls and roof, which use laminated construction, that rear cap is built using what the manufacturer calls “loose” assembly, in which the molded fiberglass end cap is attached around the perimeter to the sides and roof, while the middle of the unit is “freestanding.” The end cap shape and structure are a result of its being molded fiberglass, and it doesn’t depend on any structure behind the skin for support.

It’s possible that warped area was manufactured a bit thin, and as the wall heats and cools, it expands and contracts and causes this area to warp a bit. According to Keystone, “This is aesthetic in nature and poses no concern to the structural integrity of the unit.” In other words, it may look unattractive, but it’s nothing that’s going to harm the trailer’s structural integrity.

If the warped area really concerns you, a repair shop could add some type of reinforcement on the inside of that area to hold it flat. — J.J.

SMART CHARGER

Q In previous *RV Clinic* columns, Jeff and Ken have suggested using a smart converter or smart charger. I asked the owner of an RV sales business, and he didn’t know what a smart charger was. Are the converter and the smart charger used together, or do you take out one and install the other?

Don Kissel, Vernal, Utah

A The converter changes 120-volt AC house current to power the RV’s 12-volt DC electrical components and charge the battery. Every converter is a battery charger to some degree. A basic charger always produces the same amount of charging current. A smart charger has three stages and reduces the amount of charge current when the battery is fully charged to avoid overcharging and damaging the battery.

In short, you could remove the existing converter and replace it with a smart charger to provide more effec-

tive long-term battery charging. To be sure your current converter is not so equipped, find its make and model and check its manufacturers’ website for complete information. — J.J.

TRAILER FLOOR FLUMMOX

Q I have a question about our travel trailer floor. We had the trailer in storage from November through April 1 for the winter, and then brought it home. We went inside to check it out, and to our surprise, the floor linoleum in the kitchen and bathroom had split open. The floor underneath the linoleum is completely dry, and there is no moisture on the surface. The splits run 3 to 4 feet across the floor. After 45 years of camping and having trailers of different sorts I have never seen this happen. Are you familiar with this condition? The trailer is a 2002 30-foot Keystone Mountaineer travel trailer, and we’re the original owners. The linoleum does not seem to be glued



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down to the subfloor.

Ronald Sensor, South Elgin, Illinois

A Even if the subfloor is dry now, it might have been subject to some kind of moisture at one point. As wood absorbs moisture, it expands, and if the linoleum flooring, which does not expand when wet, is secured at the edges while the wood expands, something has to give. It may seem to have no adhesive because the moisture damaged the adhesive and caused it to fail in the area in question.

This kind of repair calls for inspection by an experienced technician who knows vinyl flooring and subfloors. Check with your local dealer for references, if their technicians cannot help. — J.J.

DULL FIBERGLASS REPAIR

Q In response to Dave Pratt's concern in the May issue for the dull fiberglass finish on his fifth-wheel, I

discovered a product called NewGlass2. I am having it applied to our 2005 Mobile Suites fifth-wheel. It is a tedious process but does wonders. The claim is that it will last up to two years and leaves a beautiful, shiny, protective finish. **Norm Michalec, Kerrville, Texas**

A Thank you for the recommendation, Norm. It's always useful when we hear from our readers with reports of effective products. — J.J.

CEILING FAN FAILURES

Q We have a 2011 Heartland Bighorn 3055RL with three slides. After several trips without a problem, the ceiling fan blades broke during travel on highway roads. After replacing the blades and arms, we made sure the blades cleared the slides when bringing them in, and then had one trip without a problem. The next trip, again making sure the blades cleared, two of the blades were broken upon arrival. After calling

Heartland twice, they deny ever having that problem.

Mary Ellen Mallan, Paradise, California

A This is the first time we've heard of this type of problem, Mary. Denying ever having the problem is pointless on the manufacturer's part, because obviously the problem exists in your trailer. Without us seeing the vehicle firsthand, it's difficult to diagnose this type of thing through the mail, so this is a situation best addressed by a local service center where the technicians can see, diagnose and repair the problem in person.

Clearly, something is shifting and causing the fan blades to jam against something vigorously enough to cause them to break off.

The fan mount at the ceiling may be loose and allow the fan to swing around while you drive, even on smooth roads, and as the blades naturally turn, even when unpowered, they can move to a spot where they contact something like a slide-out frame. Check the **(continued on page 135)**

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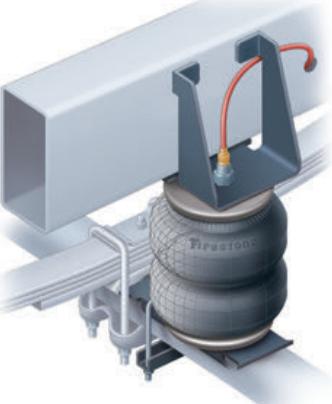


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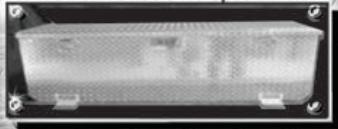
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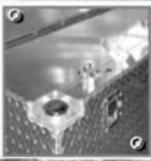
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While every effort is made to maintain accuracy and completeness, last-minute changes may occasionally result in omissions or errors.

(continued from page 131) ceiling at points roughly the diameter of the fan blades, as well, because under an extreme swinging condition, the blade tips could impact the ceiling and break. You may find marks or scratches where the blades have impacted the ceiling. If this is the case, you'll need to repair the fan mount and possibly reinforce it to avoid having the fan swing too much while traveling. — J.J.

SHABBY GRAPHICS

Q I have a 2004 NuWa Hitchhiker II. For the first few years, I always cleaned and waxed it at least once a year. The trailer never looked any better afterward, so the last couple of years I have given up on it. The graphics are all peeling and looking shabby. Is there a way I can take them off without damaging the skin on the trailer?

Charles Winston, Brighton, Colorado

A You can start by using a heat gun on low and a plastic scraping tool

like a putty knife to carefully heat the vinyl graphics and pry them from the skin. If you check at an auto-parts store or a shop that sells auto-body shop supplies, you'll find different types of spray-on adhesive removers designed specifically for this purpose. Make sure they are suitable for use on gelcoated fiberglass. Applied according to directions, they should not damage the skin or paint. — J.J.

RV BATTERY QUESTION

Q What is the preferred method to store an RV battery when the RV is not in use? I have had problems keeping my RV's battery charged. Some people have advised me to leave it hooked up, and others advised me not to leave it hooked up!

Tom Ballard, Grand Junction, Colorado

A Batteries self discharge, even when they are not connected to anything. The rule of thumb is 1 percent per day,

although this varies with temperature, battery type and condition. To make things worse, most RVs have parasitic electrical loads, such as entertainment system memories, etc., which constantly draw a small amount of current. But over time, these can completely discharge a battery and ruin it, if allowed to sit discharged.

The power converters on many RVs do not have a sophisticated charging circuit (multistage or smart charger), and therefore they tend to overcharge and "boil" out the water in the cells, ruining the battery. Therefore, we recommend that batteries be kept in a garage or someplace else where you can keep an eye on them and connect a maintenance charger (not a trickle charger) designed specifically for this task.

— Ken Freund

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RV CLINIC

on it. I noticed the left-side tires show more wear on the edges of the face. The front tire has quite a bit more wear on the inside edge than the rest of the face. On the rear tire, the same type of wear is on the outside. I crawled under the trailer and measured the distance between the axles: on the streetside it is about 32½ inches, and on the other side the distance is about 32½ inches. The only other thing I measured are the brackets that are welded to the frame. The distance between the ones on the streetside is 64½ inches, and the other side measured 64 inches. Do you think any of this could cause the unusual wear on the tires?

Bryce Chapman, Pahrump, Nevada

A Yes, the ¾-inch difference in space between the axles is certainly enough to cause a problem with tire wear because the tires aren't following the same lines, which means they're constantly scrubbing the pavement. I suggest you find a good shop that specializes in accurate alignment. A shop that works on trucks and trailers and alignment should also be able to tackle this. If you can't find one in Pahrump, you may have to take it over to Las Vegas. — **K.F.**

BOUNCING FIFTH-WHEEL

Q Our family has a Flagstaff ultralight fifth-wheel trailer. Our tow vehicle is a gas-powered F-250 pickup. The trailer has two solid axles, without any suspension components. I have read articles about adding shock kits to the trailer to reduce bounce. I feel like we have accepted the bounce long enough. Any suggestions?

David Greiner, Jamestown, Virginia

A It's important to first distinguish what you mean by "bounce" and what you're trying to achieve. When you say the trailer is without any suspension components, I assume you mean it has no shock absorbers. Monroe has retrofit kits for adding shock absorbers to trailers, which will help reduce trailer bounce, reduce wear and tear, and prevent things from getting broken

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in the trailer. However, adding shock absorbers to the trailer will not prevent bounce inside the tow vehicle. Bounce on the highway is usually caused by concrete expansion joints, and the problem can be worse on some vehicles than others depending on wheelbase and other factors. Adding an air hitch can help with jarring impacts, but it won't stop the trailer or tow vehicle from bouncing. — K.F.

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PORTABLE GENERATORS

Q Last year we purchased a new Forest River Sandpiper fifth-wheel and are getting ready to take a few long-distance trips this summer. We're looking into buying a generator for those times when we will not be plugged into shorepower in a park. Which type of generator is best suited for this — a conventional or inverter type? What are the differences?

Kevin Kerr, Cape May, New Jersey

A Inverter generators are compatible with electronic equipment such as computers and televisions, and they are quiet, so we recommend this type. They also vary their speed depending on the load setting, so they can save some fuel, compared with contractor-type generators. We ran a buyer's guide in the May issue that lists many of the available inverter generators, along with important specifications. If you plan to run the air conditioning off the generator, you may want to look at getting a type that can be paired with another identical generator for those times when you will need the extra power, unless you're willing to handle a larger generator. — K.F.

TOWING CAPACITY

Q We are new to RVing. We purchased a 2014 Ford Expedition 4x2 Limited. It includes a 5.4-liter V-8 engine, 3.73-ratio axle and the HD trailer tow package. We were told by the dealer, and confirmed from the brochure, that the towing capacity is 9,200 pounds. Our trailer is a Keystone Cougar 30FKV, and according to the brochure, the shipping weight is 7,130 pounds, carrying weight

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is 1,070 pounds, hitch weight is 860 pounds, and exterior length is 33 feet 11 inches. The manufacturer plate in the door of the tow vehicle states GVWR is 7,353 pounds.

How are these two related, and how do we use this information in determining if our vehicle will safely handle the trailer we have purchased? Even though the car and trailer dealers assured us that the Expedition can easily tow the trailer, we have our doubts.

The hitch is a Blue Ox SwayPro equalizer. The trailer is fairly stable on highways, getting only some sway when big trucks pass. However, we notice on back roads where the roads have dips and grooves that it seems to suffer more sway in the front of the SUV. Someone suggested we try air bags on our tow vehicle to level it up a little more, as it seems to be riding a little high in the front.

Our safety and that of others are our main concerns. Can we safely tow this trailer with our Expedition?

Rita Brewton, via email

A The SUV's gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) is the maximum allowable weight of the loaded vehicle (total weight on its tires). Assuming the trailer manufacturer's weights are accurate, you should be pulling about 8,200 pounds when the trailer is loaded to its safe maximum, which is well within the vehicle's 9,200 pound tow rating.

You should always weigh your loaded trailer, but if you haven't yet, you can use the trailer's GVWR as a guide. A travel trailer typically puts between 10 and 12 percent of its total weight on the hitch. Therefore, your loaded trailer should have a hitch weight close to 1,000 pounds, which is a considerable amount. If the hitch weight causes unloading of the front axle, steering stability can be affected. The symptoms you describe suggest that the spring bars aren't adjusted properly.

You didn't mention which Blue Ox SwayPro equalizer you have. There are three ratings; 750, 1,000 and 1,500 pounds. If you have the 750-pound kit, you need to upgrade. The weight-distributing hitch can help unload the

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rear of the tow vehicle and shift weight forward, which will help solve the problem. If you have the right hitch and it's adjusted properly, then consider adding air springs to the rear axle to level the load. — K.F.

HITCH AND TOWING CONCERNS

Q We recently purchased our first camping trailer, a 30-footer with a weight-distribution hitch. Regarding the hitch, receiver and ball, etc., what should I lube and what should I use to do it? We live in the Chicago area and have only towed it about 1,000 miles. Most times it tows very well, but on two trips in Wisconsin, which went around Madison on I-90, it bounced rapidly, and I couldn't seem to stop the bouncing. It doesn't do it other times. Am I hitching wrong? Is there a way I can control it? Or is it just bad road?

Dan and Karen Wills, Cary, Illinois

A You can use multipurpose grease, or buy grease sold specifically for hitches at RV shops. Apply a moderate amount (enough to cover the surfaces well, but not ooze all over) to the contact points on all the moving friction surfaces of the hitch components. The exceptions are the friction surfaces within an independent sway control or parts of a hitch system that has integrated sway control. You can also consult your hitch owner's manual or find the manual online, and it will contain specific recommendations about lubrication.

Some of the roads in your area are very rough due to frost heaves and other issues with the pavement. Repetitive pavement joints can set up a harmonic bouncing frequency that can be uncomfortable. That stretch of road near Madison is typical of concrete highways that age and develop those built-in "speed bumps." For some truck and trailer combinations, there's nothing you can do about that oscillation because of the dynamics, specific wheelbases and overall lengths. Also, keep in mind that most travel trailers do not use shock absorbers, so adding them may help — although the fabrication cost for mount-



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ing brackets and the shocks themselves can get expensive. Confirm that you have your tire pressures set properly for the load, the tow vehicle is level and the weight-distributing bars are tensioned properly. — K.F.

TIRE TIPS

Q I've read many letters in *Trailer Life* about tire problems. We have a three-axle 1979 Avion that has more than 200,000 miles on it; I've towed it all over the United States and Canada. I used to have many tire problems until I switched to bias-ply tires on the trailer. Now I run 7.00 x 15LT tires and have run them until they wear out, with no belts coming loose or blowouts. I tow this trailer with a 1985 Ford E-350 van that's been converted to a Cummins 6BT engine and now has 350,000 miles on it. The van and trailer weigh 19,700.

Earl Serry, Pahrump, Nevada

A Thanks for writing and sharing your experience. This tire solution isn't possible for everyone but is with your wheel combination, which should help some owners. When switching tires, the load ratings should be equal to or exceed the stock tires; make sure the wheels are rated properly. Also, never mix types (bias ply and radial). — K.F.

SLIDEOUT GEAR REPAIR

Q I am replacing a nylon gear in my RV slideout's motorized gear mechanism. The nylon gear is between two metal gears. What grease should I use?

Jimmy L. Siron, West Bethesda, Maryland

A This isn't a very demanding application, as it is used only occasionally and briefly. Use a white lithium grease and put enough in so everything is covered. — K.F. 📧

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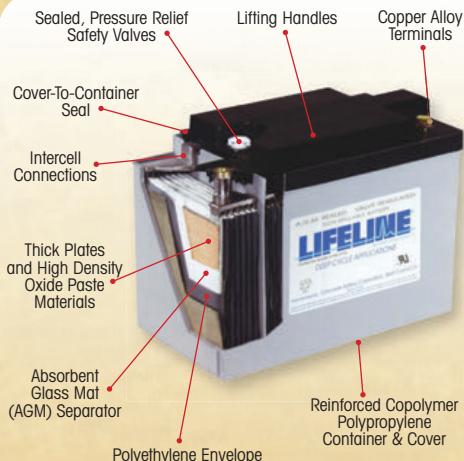


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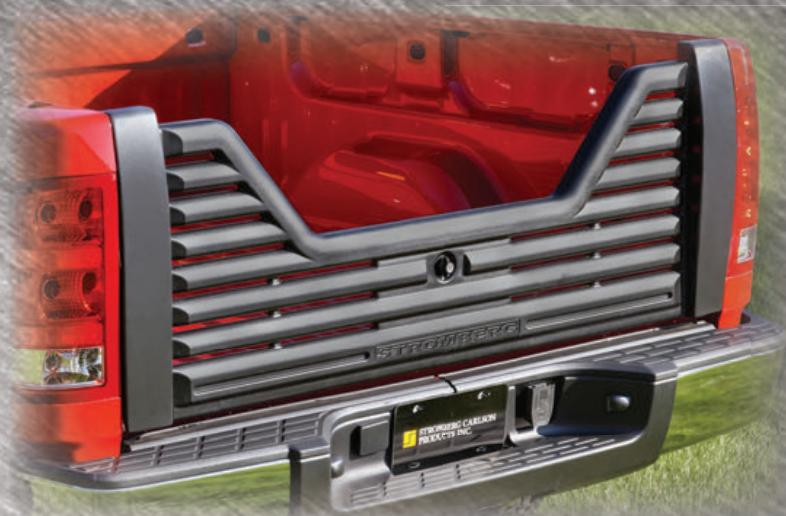
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▲ Telescoping Rail Mate For Manual Entry Steps



24" H

▲ Lend-A-Hand™ RV Hand Rail, Sparkling Silver Finish
◀ Polar White Painted Finish



18½" H

▶ Lend-A-Hand™ RV Hand, Mini Handrail



▲ Jack-in-a-Box Slideout Stabilizers, Set of 2



3500 lb. capacity with 18" stroke

▲ 3500 lb. Electric Tongue Jack, White

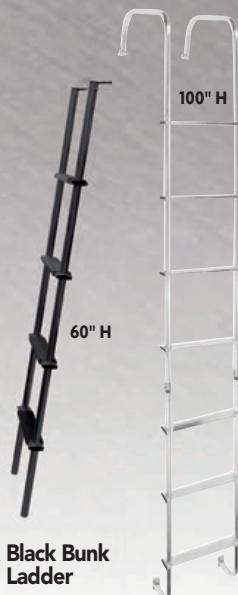
◀ 3500 lb. Electric Tongue Jack, Black



1000 lb. weight capacity

19" L x 14" W; folds to 2¾" H

▲ Aluminum Folding Step



60" H

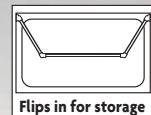
▲ Black Bunk Ladder

100" H

◀ Outdoor Universal Ladder



Great for towables



Flips in for storage



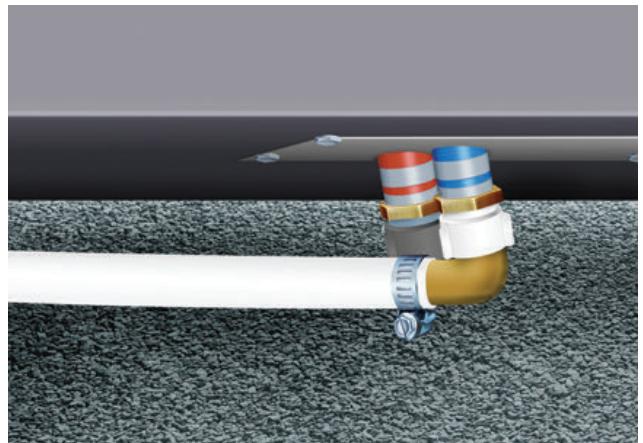
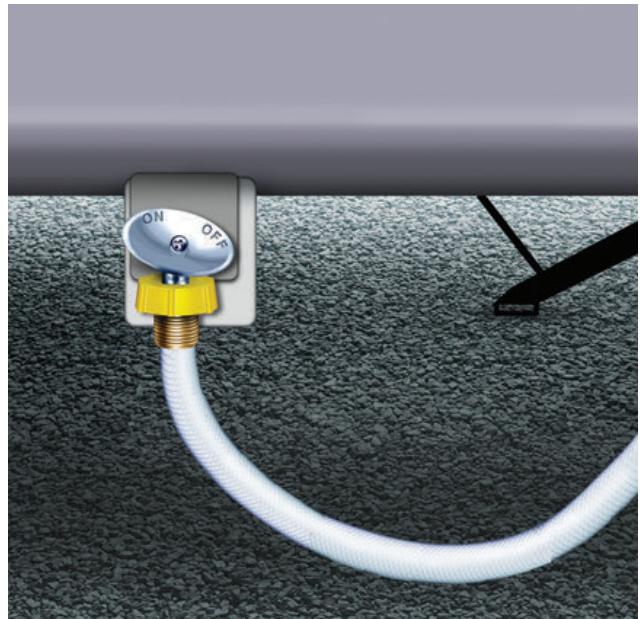
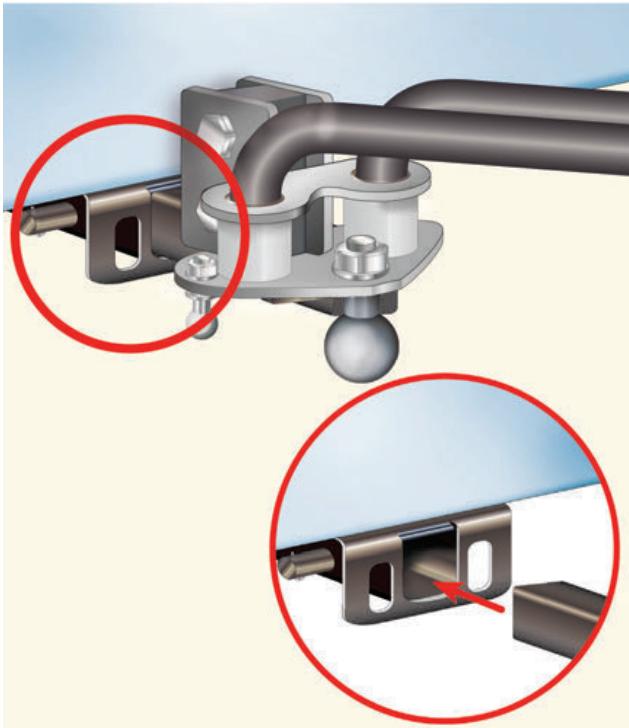
▲ Extend-A-Shower Rod
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White Finish

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The Whole Shebang

With the locking receiver pin and padlock on the trailer A-frame, I can store the whole works in one place and off the ground. This also saves my shins from getting beat up by leaving the ball mount in place on the back of my tow vehicle.

Tom Saunders, San Leandro, California



No More Hair of the Dog

We, like many people, travel with our dogs. To reduce maintenance and airborne dirt and hair, I bought vinyl floor-covering tiles that are a near-perfect match for our camper's flooring from the manufacturer. The vinyl tiles were easy to cut to the exact size of the furnace floor registers and punctured at the screw holes. The nonstick backer remains on the vinyl tiles so as to not adhere to the registers. The screws provided are long enough that replacements were not necessary. The two screws per cover are easily removed before the heat is activated (very important). As a bonus, the new covers actually blend in with the vinyl flooring so much better than the plastic register covers provided by the manufacturer!

Tim Hamilton, Miami, Florida

Outside Shower Solution

I am a camper who uses the outside shower for washing and filling water jugs. Unfortunately, the showers are always on the opposite side from the patio or at the back end. Sometimes these locations at campsites are not very user-friendly. Our new Rockwood camper already had two water fittings plumbed out for the low drain points. I simply connected a piece of PEX tubing from the cold-water line to the patio side and fashioned a 90-degree bracket and a faucet (available at hardware stores) with a hose adapter on the patio side. I use one clamp to hold up the PEX tube on the underside, so it has three-point mounting. The low drain point still works as designed. It's a real handy improvement!

Jim Roussey, Fort Wayne, Indiana



Medicine Cabinet Guard

Tired of everything falling out of our trailer's bathroom medicine cabinet every time we moved, I made a simple solution. I purchased a 4-foot-long 1-inch Lexan plastic home wall corner guard from Lowe's (also available at most other home-improvement stores). I cut pieces to fit each shelf, then put three small drops of Super Glue Gel on each piece, in case I needed to remove the guards in the future. The guards were installed in minutes, and the problem is solved, plus we can see what's behind the clear plastic.

Tom Smith, Henderson, Nevada

Everything in Its Place

We wanted to stop things from shifting around in the storage compartment of our RV. After looking at a number of things and throwing around ideas, we saw a package of children's interlocking foam alphabet mats. They are inexpensive and easy to trim where needed. They also protect the floor and the items being stored, reduce noise level and act as insulation. They can readily be found at stores with children's toys.

Gene and Rita Krehl, Alamo, Texas



QUICK FIX

Easy Sewer Hose Removal

I noticed that I was having difficulty placing and removing the sewer hose at the RV's sewer outlet. I know that my hands don't have the strength they used to, but it sure was a struggle. I thought about what would make the process easier and tried one of those strap wrenches used to install and remove oil filters. They can be found in different sizes, by the way. It worked wonderfully! Now I've turned a sometimes frustrating chore into an easy one. — **Madeline Ewing, Roseville, California** 🐾

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Waterpark Capital of the World

The Laskaris family made a splash in the '70s in Wisconsin Dells and now owns one of the world's largest waterpark complexes



Wisconsin Dells is in the bottom half of Wisconsin about an hour north of Madison. It was originally called Kilbourn City. For some reason, its fire department is still the Kilbourn Fire Department, and there is the Kilbourn Public Library, the Kilbourn Station and the Kilbourn Dam.

The city was renamed in 1931. By then, new roads and dependable automobiles had changed the way we travel. America was now a nation of independent, auto-borne tourists, no longer tied to a train schedule for destination choices. All the roads were backroads then, and we wondered where they went. So we headed out to experience the places we had seen only in pictures.

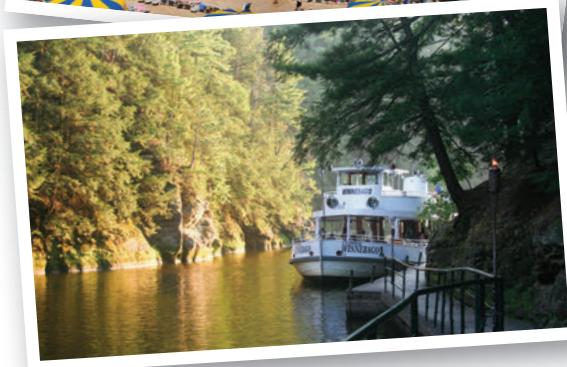
We traveled to Kilbourn City from big cities and small towns to see what was known as the "dells of Wisconsin" — specifically, the dells of the Wisconsin River with its 100-foot walls of sandstone. Soon the folks here decided to give up "Kilbourn" and put the city on the map using the descriptive name by which the traveling public now knew it.

In recent years, it has taken on another descriptive name: Waterpark Capital of the World. This town of 2,400 people has the largest concentration of waterparks on the planet. It has America's largest outdoor waterpark, the state's largest indoor waterpark and the country's largest indoor and outdoor combination.

The Wisconsin River runs into the center of town, where its pace is slowed by the century-old Kilbourn Dam. In a glacially formed gorge, the river's sides are layered sandstone that is found only three places on earth. This stratified rock is so porous it nourishes and supports trees.

These towering sandstone formations drew photographer H.H. Bennett to the dells in 1865. The popularity of his photographs — with Mother Nature's work — brought the first tourists here more than a century ago.

Then in 1946 came a new way of seeing the river. A gent from Milwaukee brought in some DUKW amphibious personnel carriers used in World War II, colloquially known



(From top) In Wisconsin Dells, Nick Laskaris has built one of the world's largest waterparks at Mt. Olympus Resort. Cruising the Wisconsin River is an attraction of the dells. Here a boat docks to let passengers disembark for a close look at rock formations.

as Ducks. It was an impulse buy he made at an auction of war-surplus trucks. His impulse turned out to be a good one, as Wisconsin Dells now has the largest fleet of Ducks in the country. They are seen here every day — on the streets in town, on the river, on Lake Delton and on wilderness trails.

In 1953 Tommy Bartlett's Thrill Show opened here. This show of water-skiers and boat jumpers brought a whole new pack of tourists to the dells, and it has never been the same since.

Nick Laskaris grew up here in the '70s and has watched the growth of Wisconsin Dells. "My dad started here flipping hamburgers. He tried a couple of other things that did not work." Then he created an elevated go-kart track — the first one ever built. Nick, at 9 years old, was the chief mechanic.

Nick has no recall of not working. His work ethic — taught to him by his dad — is what Nick credits with his success: At age 48, he now has one of the world's largest water and theme park resorts. Nick has built much of it himself. He never went beyond high school — in fact, he says he has never read a book — but he designed and engineered most of the theme park.

Last year more than a million people came to swim, ride, slide and splash in the Laskaris' parks. Those numbers must be gratifying to Nick, who has spent his life building a place where families can have fun together.

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Fig. 1 Saturn



Fig. 3 Asteroid Gaspia



Fig. 5 Mercury



Fig. 7 Jupiter



Fig. 2 Neptune

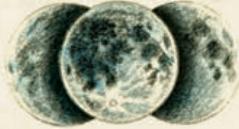


Fig. 4 Phases of the Moon



Fig. 6 Mars

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