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➤ **Bully Dog's PCM unlock and GT Diesel Tuner make up to 75 hp in 2013 Ram pickups. Page 65**

On the cover: The Sierra Nevada serves as a magnificent backdrop for the Ford F-150 and Winnebago Ultralite trailer. Photo by Chris Hemer

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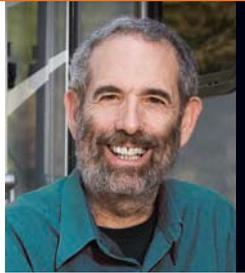
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Going Ultralight

New designs, materials and floorplans are driving the lightweight market



Remember when ultralight trailers were, well, boring? For the longest time, the trailers that held an ultralight moniker were fitted with Spartan amenities. Most were stick and tin (wood framing and hung aluminum siding) with a few rogue models using fiberglass shells. In order to keep the weight down, these trailers had to be small. And with that came cramped quarters with smallish beds and barely usable bathrooms.

Our first trailer was a 13-foot Cardinal that was light enough to be towed by a passenger car. While the little Cardinal was well built, it left much to be desired. It had a dinette that converted into a bed, a tiny galley with an icebox and a closet that doubled as a room for a portable toilet. Driving home from our inaugural camping trip towing the Cardinal, we stopped at the dealer and traded it for a larger, fully self-contained 19-footer. But it wasn't light, so we traded the car for a pickup truck.

Lightweight building materials, including composites, and modern construction techniques have transformed the ultralight trailer segment into a totally different product. A good example of this transformation is the Winnebago Ultralite 28DDBH featured on page 50. Here's a trailer that's almost 34 feet long, weighs 7,460 pounds with full water and LP-gas and can easily be towed by a half-ton pickup — and with improved fuel economy, the truck is also practical as a daily driver.

Inside, the Winnebago has enough room for a large family with a nice master bedroom, expansive kitchen with an island counter and a large bathroom that can be accessed by a separate entry door to keep the kids — and messy grownups — from traipsing throughout the interior.

For most RV enthusiasts, the Winnebago name is iconic to the motorhome industry and incongruent to trailers. Fact is, Winnebago is no stranger to trailer manufacturing; the company was founded as a trailer builder in 1958. The first motorhome didn't roll off the Winnebago assembly line until 1966. So after a long hiatus, the company is back building trailers and fifth-wheels after purchasing long-time builder Sunnybrook in December 2010.

Potential buyers, who peruse the Winnebago towable floorplans, will undoubtedly notice how the company's designers have captured ideas from its motorhome division. And Winnebago is not alone (see Sonic 190VRB, page 56) in the quest to make the ultralight one of the most exciting — and practical — segments of the RV market.

It's a good time to be in the market for a lightweight trailer. 🚐

— Bob Livingston, publisher

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DID YOU KNOW?

Winnebago Industries was originally named Modernistic Industries of Iowa, and was founded February 12, 1958.

The company's first travel trailer, which rolled off the production line on March 19, 1958, was a 15-foot unit called the Aljo. The trailer cost \$895.

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

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

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

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Lakes and More Lakes

I enjoy reading Bill Graves' view on places he has visited. His style of writing is easy to read and insightful. In his September *America's Outback* column, he mentioned that the number of lakes in Minnesota, the state he grew up in, was a source of pride until visiting a neighboring state that claimed to have more.

I live in Canada, which has more lakes than the total number of lakes in all the countries of the world combined! What I find interesting while traveling around in our RV during the last 20 years is the common goal we share as fellow travelers. There are more things that draw us closer than those that separate us. For example, the cost of fuel, food, insurance and health care all impact our bottom lines, which dictates what we can afford to do and where we can afford to go.

Thanks for Bill's articles.

Richard Murphy, Aldergrove, B.C., Canada

Like Bill Graves, I grew up in Minnesota. I always thought it was cool driving around with "Land of 10,000 Lakes" on our license plates. It was like we were "King of the Lakes."

I recently found out that Alaska, which became a state in 1959, has 3-million-plus lakes (wow!) of 20 acres or larger. The state has so many lakes it has named only just over 3,000 of them! I think 1959 was when that should have been removed from our license plates.

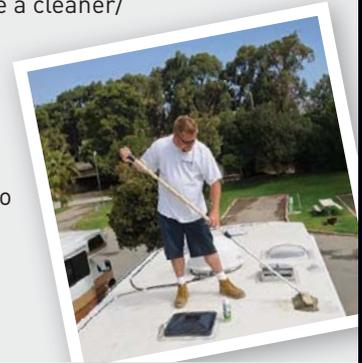
I also had another one of these "misconceptions." I graduated from Alexander Ramsey High School in Roseville, Minnesota. They always told us that Alexander Ramsey was the first governor of the state of Minnesota. I recently found out that is not true. Alexander Ramsey was the first territorial governor of Minnesota. Henry Sibley was the first governor of the state of Minnesota.

I moved to the Land of 15,000

View From the Top

Superb article by Emily and Mark Fagan, *Keeping an RV Roof in TipTop Shape*, September issue. In my opinion, the best material for a roof is aluminum. It is virtually indestructible. There's a little pitter-patter when it rains heavily, but that adds to the romance! I purchased a 1995 KZ Sportsmen new. It's a great fifth-wheel. I use a cleaner/polish combo and a long-handled "wash-type" brush to apply it, then hand wipe. It eliminates black streaks, plus rain and snow just beads/slides off. There are a few crater marks on the roof, but I've never had to repair it or fix a leak. It takes me about two hours to check seams, plus wax my 27-foot fifth-wheel.

Rich Berte, Marlborough, Massachusetts



Lakes in 1977. I live 45 miles north of Elkhart Lake. Bill is correct, it is a cool place!

Dennis Gratke, Via email

No Pass Required

In *Lush Landscapes & Steaming Lattes* by Irene Middlemen Thomas, September issue, under the heading "Orcas Island Campgrounds," she mentions that a Discover Pass is required for vehicle access to state parks. While this is true, readers might like to know that if you are a paid camper at the state park, the pass is not required.

Gene Paine, Carnation, Washington

Half-Ton Fun

Regarding Ron Schafer's letter "Climbing Mountains" in the September issue, my husband and I have the same half-ton Dodge Ram he has and we've been to Canada, the Smokies, Niagara Falls — and the list goes on. We pull a 28-footer with two slides and have also never experienced any problems with our 2003 Quad Cab Hemi. The only thing we would like it to have is a bigger gas

tank because when we are traveling with our diesel buddies we need to stop for gas before they stop for diesel.

Charles and Alice White, Eustis, Florida



EverGreen Correction

In the September issue in *Around the Bend*, page 12, in the write-up on EverGreen's Bay Hill 340RK, the wrong interior photo was used. Above are some photos of the company's newest fifth-wheel with a rear kitchen floorplan. Ed 📧

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PHOTOS BY GUY SELBERT



"Playin' o' the pipes." Bagpipers and drummers lead the parade at Salado's Highland Games. (Right) A Highlander holds onto his kilt as he throws the 22-pound Scottish Hammer.

Highland Games

Salado, Texas, celebrates Scottish and Celtic culture with heavy athletics, bagpipes and kilts

by Pamela Selbert

Scottish immigrants settled in Salado, Texas, nearly two centuries ago, and though many decades have passed since then, the Scottish heritage of the area is still apparent — especially in November every year. Since 1961 the town (about 150 miles north of San Antonio) has hosted an annual Highland Games — "heavy athletics" that have been played in the Highlands of Scotland for centuries.

The three-day event, held the second weekend of the month, draws some 6,500 visitors to the town, says Dave Boyens, president of the Central Texas Area Museum, which hosts the games. Competitors — usually about 30 men and women — come from all over the United States and elsewhere to take part, he says.

Sporting contests include the Scottish Hammer Throw (in which a 22-pound ball is tossed), a Stone Throw (similar to a shot put, using a 24-26-pound stone) and a Clans Tug-a-War, among others. Boyens explains that up to 65 Scottish clans gather here for the games.

The festival, which opens with a Gathering of the Clans on the town's College Hill, also includes a shortbread cookie competition, a Bonniest Knees contest (all men taking part in the competitions wear Scottish kilts) and Scottish dances (dancers compete for world championship points).

An array of food vendors sell typical fair cuisine and dishes early Scottish immigrants enjoyed. A favorite, says Boyens, is Haggis, a mix of barley, oatmeal, plus sheep liver, kidney and heart, and ale steamed in the lining of a sheep's stomach.

Arts and crafts booths offer a variety of Scottish-style clothing, swords and knives. After the Sunday Scottish church service, a Flowers of the Forest will take place, during which the names of Salado residents who have died in war will be read and bagpipers play. Celtic music will be performed throughout the festival.

Boyens explains that in the 1820s Colonel Sterling Clack Robertson brought a "handful" of Scottish

immigrants here from Tennessee. Robertson's plantation home may be toured at the festival (or by appointment). The museum, which occupies a former mercantile built in 1840, will also be open during the event. Exhibits depict the story of Texas including, of course, the Scottish influence in this area.

The Highland Games festival will take place November 8-10 at the town's 15-acre Civic Center. Admission per day is \$15 for adults, \$6 for ages 6-15, or \$20 for both days for adults and \$10 for youngsters (free for age 5 and under).

For information, contact the museum at 254-947-5232 or visit www.saladoscottishgames.org

Campground Information
www.texascamping.com

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TrailManor Classic Folding 2417

TrailManor, maker of lightweight trailers that can be towed by an SUV or a properly equipped minivan, revealed its 2014 models that include new exterior graphics on all models and additional floorplans for its 2417 trailer. TrailManor trailers are hard-sided but collapse similar to a tent trailer. The 2417, the smallest in the company's lineup, is available in Sport and Standard versions; the Standard being 6 inches wider than the 7-foot 1-inch Sport. For 2014, the company has added two front slideout choices for the 2417 that replace the double beds in front with either a dinette or a living room with sofa bed; a king bed at the back is standard. On the non-slideout versions, there's a king-sized



bed at one end, a double-bed at the other, and a full kitchen with refrigerator and two-burner stove. The 2417s weigh a claimed 2,150-2,280 pounds dry, have an interior length of 21 feet 6 inches when opened, a towing length of 18 feet and offer 6 feet 4 inches of headroom. A wet bath with cassette toilet and shower are optional.

MSRP: \$21,371-\$26,831, www.trailmanor.com



NEWSWIRE

RV MUSEUM



Crean Foundation Donates Four Historic Fleetwood RVs

The RV/MH Hall of Fame Museum in Elkhart, Indiana, recently received a collection of historic Fleetwood RVs in memory of Fleetwood founder John Crean. The RVs are from the early days of the former Fleetwood Enterprises of Riverside, California, according to Darryl Searer, president, RV/MH Hall of Fame. Now on display in the museum is a 1950 12-foot Fleetwood Sporter, which was the first trailer built when Fleetwood grew out of Coach Specialties Company, a builder of Venetian blinds for trailers; and a Fleetwood Sportster, a later version of the same trailer. Also included is an extensive collection of Fleetwood documents and memorabilia.

PRODUCTION



Winnebago Towables Reopens Second Plant

Middlebury, Indiana-based Winnebago Industries Towables has reopened its second production facility, and the new 2014 Raven was the first product to come off the line. "We are very excited to reopen the SunnyBrook plant," said Winnebago Industries Towables President Johnny Hernandez. "Due to increased demand for our Winnebago brand products, which doubled in volume within the last year, as well as the redesign of the entire SunnyBrook product line, we needed to reopen the second production facility." Along with the new Raven mid-profile fifth-wheel, the company's Sunset Creek and Remington trailers have been redesigned for 2014.

BUSINESS



Thor Buys Lightweight RV Manufacturer Livin' Lite

Thor Industries Inc. has acquired the assets of Livin' Lite Recreational Vehicles LLC. "We are pleased to welcome Livin' Lite to the Thor family of RV brands. Adding such a creative RV maker to Thor's strong stable of brands will enable us to expand our industry-leading position in new product development into camping trailers and truck campers," said Bob Martin, Thor president and CEO. Founded by former Heartland RV LLC co-founder and executive Scott Tuttle, Wakarusa, Indiana-based Livin' Lite is known for its lightweight aluminum construction applied to a variety of smaller RVs, including travel trailers, toy haulers, camping trailers and truck campers.

PHOTO BY KEN ZIRKEL



Birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution

The Blackstone River Valley region, located in northern Rhode Island and south central Massachusetts, is celebrating 220 years as the place where the nation's Industrial Revolution started in 1793 when Samuel Slater began manufacturing textiles in the still-standing Slater Mill Historic Site in Pawtucket.

One of the region's events is a Colonial Dinner at the Smith-Appleby House in Smithfield. The house/museum started as a one-room stone-ender built circa 1696 and is on the National Register of Historic Places. Guests to the November 8-9 event will enjoy a Colonial-style dinner prepared and served by docents dressed in period costume. Visit www.smithapplebyhouse.org

The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council also offers bicycle tours through the region; call 401-724-2200 or visit www.tourblackstone.com.

Camping: George Washington Management Area open until end of October
Normandy Farms Family Camping Resort, Foxboro, Massachusetts, open April 1-November 30, 866-673-2767, www.normandyfarms.com



Going Places

"Going Places" is the theme for 2014's RV Vacation & Travel Show taking place January 9-12, 2014 at America's Center in downtown St. Louis, Missouri. Almost 300 RVs will be on display, including fifth-wheels, folding camper trailers, truck campers, motorhomes, van conversions and sport utility trailers. There will be vendors displaying RV products and services, travel destinations, resorts and campgrounds, as well as John Holod and his "Roads to Adventure" films on the Gulf Coast and Southeast and Northeast coasts. Also featured will be talks by authors of Missouri travel books and RV product seminars.

Admission is \$9, children ages 6-12 are \$4, age 5 and under are admitted free. A senior discount will be available on Thursday and Friday, with those age 60 and up admitted for \$6. Hours are Thursday 11 a.m. - 9 p.m.; Friday 11 a.m. - 10 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. and Sunday 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.

618-288-9952, www.stlrv.com



Audiovox Car Connection

Audiovox has introduced Car Connection, a mini plug-in device that allows drivers to monitor, manage and maintain the health of their vehicles. It plugs into the vehicle diagnostic port on 1996 and newer OBDII-equipped gas and diesel vehicles, and is a good tool to ensure your vehicle is ready for road trips. It checks for trouble codes and lets you know what's wrong when a "check engine" light comes on. The unit can monitor driving habits and give fuel-saving tips. It also "knows" where your vehicle is and you can track it online, which is also good for theft recovery.

For more information, call 800-300-4550 or visit www.mycar-connection.com — Ken Freund



Roof Ruckus

Hoping that an out-of-warranty repair was eligible for reimbursement because of a pre-existing record of repair during its warranty period, a reader asked *RV Action Line* to get involved. He wrote:

» In May 2011, I bought a new Montana Mountaineer 326 RLT (by Keystone) from Pan Pacific RV Center in Stockton, California. That September, I noticed an area on the roof where something was poking up through the roof membrane. I took the fifth-wheel back to the dealer to have the problem repaired under warranty. They described the issue as roof staples backing out of the roof sheathing.

Fast-forward two years to today. While cleaning the RV after a trip, I noticed another area where something was poking through the roof lining in the same area as the

I noticed an area on the roof where something was poking up through the roof membrane.

No-Claim Refund

Seeking reimbursement for an unused service contract, a reader asked *RV Action Line* to intervene. He wrote:

» When I purchased a fifth-wheel from Dean's RV Superstore in Tulsa, Oklahoma, I also bought a service contract. American Guardian Warranty Services Inc. administered the contract, which cost \$1,773. In addition to the service contract, I made a payment to Delich & Associates Inc. for a Service Contract Refund Guarantee. According to the contract, if I did not have a claim within four years, Delich & Associates would refund me \$1,773.

After the four-year period, I applied for the guaranteed refund via registered mail to Delich & Associates. I made three phone calls to the company, and was assured a check would be mailed in six to eight weeks. The fourth time I called, the phone was disconnected. I called Dean's RV Superstore, but it refused

responsibility for the refund. Can *RV Action Line* help me collect my money?

Jake Helmuth, Adair, Oklahoma

For those entertaining the idea of purchasing a service agreement that includes a refund provision, first find out who is contractually responsible for any refund, and what happens in the event that one or more of the parties goes out of business. These provisions should be clearly noted in the contract before signing. In Helmuth's case, Dean's RV Superstore facilitated the execution of the service agreement, but was not a party to the agreement.

We weren't sure we could help

Helmuth, but we contacted Dean's RV Superstore on his behalf.

THE COMPANY RESPONDED

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Mr. Helmuth's complaint pertaining to the refund guarantee he contracted with Delich & Associates. Sadly, Delich & Associates has unexpectedly gone out of business.

As a goodwill gesture, Dean's RV Superstore is offering Helmuth a store credit of \$886.50, which could be used for parts or service, or a one-time cash payment of \$443.25.

**Randy Coy, Owner
Dean's RV Superstore, LLC
Tulsa, Oklahoma**

problem in 2011. I took the fifth-wheel to the dealer, who confirmed it was the same problem. He said that since it was out of warranty it would cost \$750 to repair. I contacted Keystone for warranty consideration, which was denied.

I think Keystone should reimburse me for the cost of repair. I realize that warranties have a beginning and an end, but I have done nothing to the trailer that could have caused this damage. Any assistance *RV Action Line* can give me would be appreciated.

John Hunt, Stockton, California

RV Action Line contacted Keystone RV Company in an attempt to facilitate a positive resolution to Hunt's dilemma. We received a response from Keystone as well as the following letter from Hunt that filled us in on the conclusion to his case. It read:

» Soon after Keystone received the letter, the company contacted me via email and agreed to reimburse me for the full amount of the repairs to the roof of my trailer. I am now a happy camper. This has restored my faith in Keystone's commitment to provide excellent customer service for its products.

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

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Miles of Exploration

Slot canyons for hiking and Lake Powell for water recreation are part of this vast landscape of buttes, mesas and cliffs

In 1869, explorer John Wesley Powell described the region that is today known as Glen Canyon National Recreation Area as, "A curious ensemble of wonderful features...." The luminous blue sky, powerful river and salmon-colored rock walls that Powell experienced acted in concert to create one of the most scenic locations on Earth. Of course, when Powell negotiated the rapids of the Colorado River, the water flowed freely. In 1962, however, Glen Canyon Dam was built, producing hydroelectric power but also impeding the flow of the Colorado. The enormous body of water that resulted from the stoppage of the river, Lake Powell, submerged slot canyons and petroglyphs, the loss of which many people

consider to be sacrilegious.

Yet as vociferously as environmentalists — author Edward Abbey foremost among them — decried what they deemed to be the desecration of this portion of Utah and Arizona, more than 2 million visitors annually partake of the 1.2 million acres that encompass Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

Visitors willing to explore on foot can hike through numerous slot canyons and discover various petroglyphs. And travelers who prefer aquatic adventures can literally navigate hundreds of miles of placid water within the bounds of the recreation area.

One of the most popular methods by which to explore the main channels, giant arms and large coves is by renting a houseboat. No elaborate training is required to pilot these watercrafts, but boaters should study the

maps of the lake carefully, because trying to turn a veritable barge around in a slot canyon could unduly tarnish visitors' opinions of Lake Powell. Small powerboats, PWCs, canoes and kayaks, though, are perfect for poking around slot canyons. And the lake is tailor made for exploring by small sailboat, beaching the craft in a remote cove, then basking in moon glow in quiet seclusion.

Visitors can enjoy Glen Canyon in many ways, including exploring the lake on day trips and spending evenings in campgrounds at the four major marinas. No matter how travelers choose to experience Glen Canyon, they should do their best to see Rainbow Bridge National Monument. At 290 feet high, it is among the world's highest natural bridges. 📍

Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, 928-608-6200, www.nps.gov/glca



DID YOU KNOW?

Glen Canyon Dam was built in an almost inaccessible area and is one of the major engineering and construction achievements in the United States.



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TOP 10 HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS

From California to New York, here are places to make the season brighter and the journey worth celebrating

Thanksgiving to New Year's is a special time to spend with family and friends and experience the spirit of the season. And the way we see it, the holiday season spent in an RV — whether a standalone trip or making interesting stops en route to a destination — is all about the journey to find unique ways to celebrate. From California to New York, we've gathered together 10 destinations that are well worth the lasting memories they'll make this year.

CALIFORNIA

Every year, just a week before Christmas, Newport Beach hosts a five-night boat parade and "Spectacular Ring of Lights Home Decorating Contest" event. At the 2013 Christmas

Boat Parade from December 18-22 (www.christmasboatparade.com), visitors will see beautiful multimillion-dollar yachts, kayaks, canoes and other small boats lighting up the harbor as a dazzling array of holiday lights and

music fill the air. Many of the boats will be richly decorated with animated Christmas scenes accompanied by music and costumed carolers. The Christmas floats will wind their way some 14 miles around the harbor to give viewers in restaurants, yacht clubs, on public beaches and in private homes an incredible sight that has delighted millions of people.

Nestled in the heart of Orange County, Newport Dunes RV Waterfront Resort and Marina (a first-rate RV park on 110 acres with cottages for rent) is a great place to camp during the festivities. In December, visitors to Newport Dunes can also enjoy the resort's own Lighting of the Bay celebration. The resort offers on-site boat rentals for tours of the Back Bay and holiday lights in the harbor. Contact **Newport Dunes RV Waterfront Resort** at 800-765-7661, www.newportdunes.com.

Additional nearby RV parks include: **Canyon RV Park**, Anaheim, 714-637-0210, www.canyonrvpark.com
Huntington By The Sea RV Park, Huntington Beach, 714-536-8316, www.hbbythesea.com

FLORIDA

If Florida is on your itinerary as a winter getaway, be sure to visit in time for the holidays on the Emerald Coast. Beginning a week before Thanksgiving and ending New Year's Eve, Okaloosa County will host "A Very Emerald Christmas." Events start November 23 with the Lighting of the Christmas tree at the Destin Commons (Destin, Florida), featuring festivities, a Santa

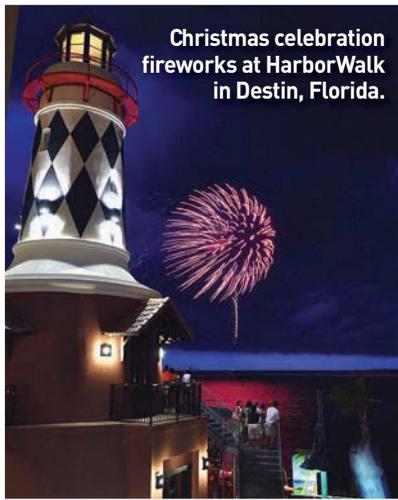
PHOTO BY STEVE FRANKIN



Thousands of Christmas lights welcome visitors to McAdenville's Christmas Town USA in North Carolina.



PHOTO COURTESY OF EMERALD GRANDE



Christmas celebration fireworks at HarborWalk in Destin, Florida.

Parade and fireworks. On November 29, Santa makes his entrance by parade float to HarborWalk Village (Destin, Florida) and is joined for daylong festivities by Charles Dickens-style carolers. On December 2, Fort Walton Beach Christmas Parade will take place on Eglin Parkway, featuring floats, marching bands and local organizations. On December 5, the Fort Walton Beach Boat Parade Festival takes place at The Landing. And, on December 8, Emerald Coast visitors can enjoy the Destin Boat Parade at the Destin Harbor and HarborWalk Village. All commercial, charter and private boats are invited to help light up the Harbor with the true Destin spirit in this annual parade. A fireworks display closes out the festivities. HarborWalk also features New Year's Eve fireworks and a ball drop at midnight.

Local RV resorts include:
Camp Gulf, Destin, 877-226-7485, www.campgulf.com
Destin West RV Resort, Destin, 850-200-4533, www.destinwestrvresort.com
Henderson Beach State Park, Destin, 800-326-3521, www.floridastateparks.org

IDAHO

RV travelers in the Intermountain West region will find holiday cheer, lights and magic at various events happening from Thanksgiving through early January in Boise. Holiday

highlights include Winter Garden aGlow (November 28-December 1, and December 6-January 5, 2014), where the Idaho Botanical Garden is lit with hundreds of thousands of lights. And, every year during Thanksgiving week, Boise Centre becomes a wonderland of holiday splendor for The Festival of Trees (November 27-December 1) that features hundreds of lavishly decorated Christmas trees, wreaths and holiday decor. Enhancing this remarkable display is a series of special events designed to please people of all ages. From the black-tie Gala to Breakfast With Santa, there is something for all ages of visitors to enjoy.

Boise's RV parks include:
Boise Riverside RV Park, Boise, 208-375-7432, www.boiseriversidervpark.com
Hi Valley RV Park, Boise, 888-457-5959, www.g7rvresorts.com/hi-valley/index.aspx
Mountain View RV Park, Boise, 208-345-4141, www.boiservpark.com

INDIANA

What started as a name has become a way of life for the small town of Santa Claus, Indiana (www.santaclausind.org). It's also one that's authentic, right down to the names of local streets, like Prancer Drive, Chestnuts Roasting by the Open Fire Street, and Jingle Bell and Candy Cane lanes. When it comes to making holiday

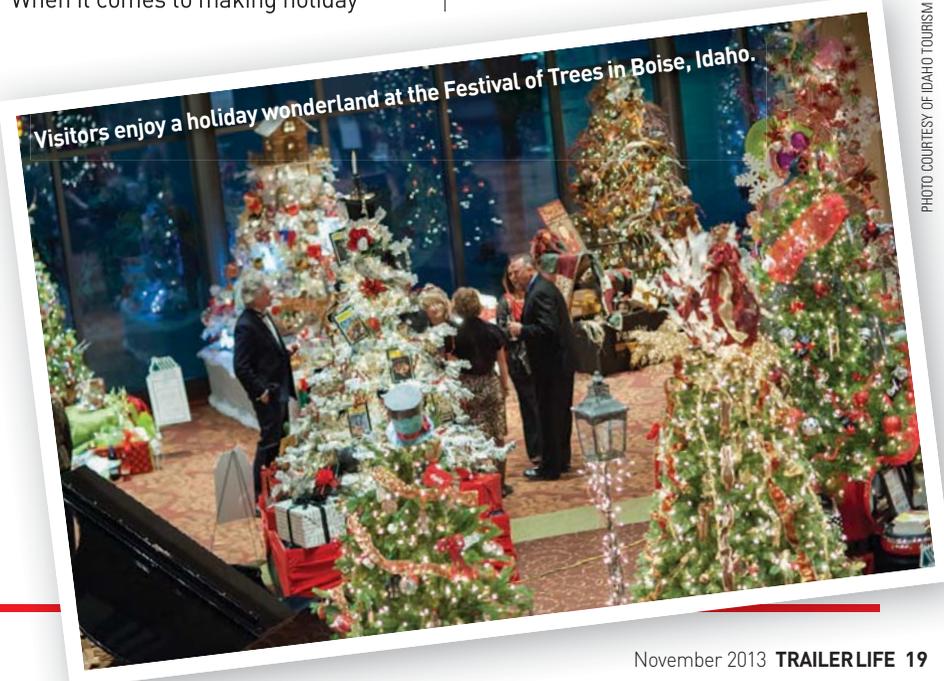
memories, it's quite the fun destination for visitors of all ages, says Melissa Brockman, executive director of the Spencer County Visitors Bureau.

"The magical Christmas spirit is found year-round in Santa Claus, Indiana, but the town goes all out during the holidays. Believers of all ages can write a letter to Santa at the original Santa Claus, Indiana, Post Office, chat with an elf at Santa's Candy Castle, learn the magical story of Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer at the Santa Claus Land of Lights, have Christmas Dinner with Santa at Santa's Lodge and so much more," Brockman commented.

RV parks that are accessible within 15-30 miles of Santa Claus include:
Lincoln State Park, Lincoln City, 812-937-4710, www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/2979.htm
Lynnville Park Campgrounds, Lynnville, 812-922-5144
Vanderburgh 4-H Center, Evansville, 812-867-6217, www.Vanderburgh4hcenter.com

NEW YORK

Combined with accessible public transportation, holiday attractions throughout New York City abound to make a trip well worth the RV journey any year. In case you need guidance on what attraction to bite off first in the Big Apple, here are a few tips that appeal to a range of city tourists' tastes. The



Visitors enjoy a holiday wonderland at the Festival of Trees in Boise, Idaho.

PHOTO COURTESY OF IDAHO TOURISM

Holiday Train Show, held at The New York Botanical Garden (www.nybg.org) in the Bronx offers visitors a unique train trip — one that's set in the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, with large-scale model trains covering a quarter-mile of track that travels over bridges and past replicas of New York landmarks. The Radio City's Christmas Spectacular (www.radiocitychristmas.com) features the Radio City Music Hall decked out in all its glory for the season as a glistening winter wonderland and the Rockettes performing numbers, to telling Christmas stories from Santa, to the Nutcracker and nativity scenes. Additional famous attractions include visiting the tree at Rockefeller Center Plaza; visiting shop windows and making a stop at FAO Schwarz toy store; as well as attending The Nutcracker production by the New York City Ballet; and traveling outside Manhattan for holiday lights (with more than 100,000 other visitors a year) to view Christmas displays at Dyker Heights in Brooklyn. If you're in New York for Thanksgiving, the Macy's Day Parade takes place on November 28 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. And if you're closing out 2013 in the city, be sure to enjoy an unforgettable night in Times Square.

Reservations for both New York attractions and RV parks in advance are highly recommended. RV parks accessible to New York during the holiday season include:

Black Bear Campground, Florida, New York, 845-651-7717, www.black

bearcampground.com
Camp Gateway, located at Floyd Bennett Field (note: only six dry camping sites) in Brooklyn, New York, 718-338-3799, www.nps.gov/gate/plan_yourvisit/camping-at-gateway.htm
Liberty Harbor Marina and RV Park, Jersey City, New Jersey, 201-516-7500, www.libertyharborrv.com

NORTH CAROLINA

Eleven months out of the year, one may find the town of McAdenville, North Carolina — 15 miles outside Charlotte — much like any other suburb. But from December 2-26, 2013, for the 58th consecutive year, visitors who come by this town will discover a unique destination that calls itself "Christmas Town USA" (www.mcadenville-christmas-town.com).

Since 1956, McAdenville's Christmas Town USA has delighted young and old alike throughout the region with its annual Christmas Light displays. Each year more than 600,000 people visit this small town of less than 700 people to experience the Christmas they remember from their childhood — a magical and merry place with hundreds of thousands of lights, spontaneous caroling and shouts of "Merry Christmas" from children walking beneath the lights and riding along the display route in cars. This is a place where the celebration of the season is always free — with Pharr Yarns, a McAdenville-based manufacturing firm established in 1939, funding the annual light displays, and supported by the decorating efforts of nearly every resident. "Christmas Town USA is much like a Norman Rockwell painting of a Christmas in small town America come to life," said Mel Collins, V.P. human resources, Pharr Yarns.

RV campground accommodations within a 15-30 mile radius include:
Crown International Campground, Fort Mill, South Carolina, 803-547-3500

.....
Elvis Presley fans enjoy musical performances during Christmas at Graceland Celebration in Memphis, Tennessee.

Hounds Gateway Campground and Fun Park, Kings Mountain, North Carolina, 704-739-4474, www.houndsgatewaycampground.com
Tom Johnson Campground at Charlotte Motor Speedway, Concord, North Carolina (call office for reservations and information), 704-455-3267

OKLAHOMA

For RVers en route to Oklahoma or those traveling through it during the holiday season, the city of Muskogee offers one of the largest Christmas light displays in the state.

"Our holiday displays have been rated as some of the best in the region," said Jonita Mullins of Okie Heritage Tours. "And they're just minutes from Highway 69, a favorite route of snowbirds heading south. A side trip through Muskogee's dazzling holiday wonderland is well worth the effort."

Two parks — one a 120-acre city park and one an amusement park — coordinate their Garden of Lights and Christmas Kingdom to create a magical spectacle that draws more than 100,000 visitors between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. Honor Heights Park and The Castle of Muskogee welcomes RVers to drive through a wonderland of more than 1 million twinkling lights and holiday inflatable displays. The lights in Honor Heights Park are timed to dance to the sound of Christmas music.

Nearby RV accommodations include:
Crossroads RV Park, Muskogee, 918-686-9104, www.thebestcrossroadsrvpark.com

Hidden Valley RV Park, Porter, 918-681-4457, www.hiddenvalleylvparkok.com

Meadowbrook RV Park, Muskogee, 918-681-4574

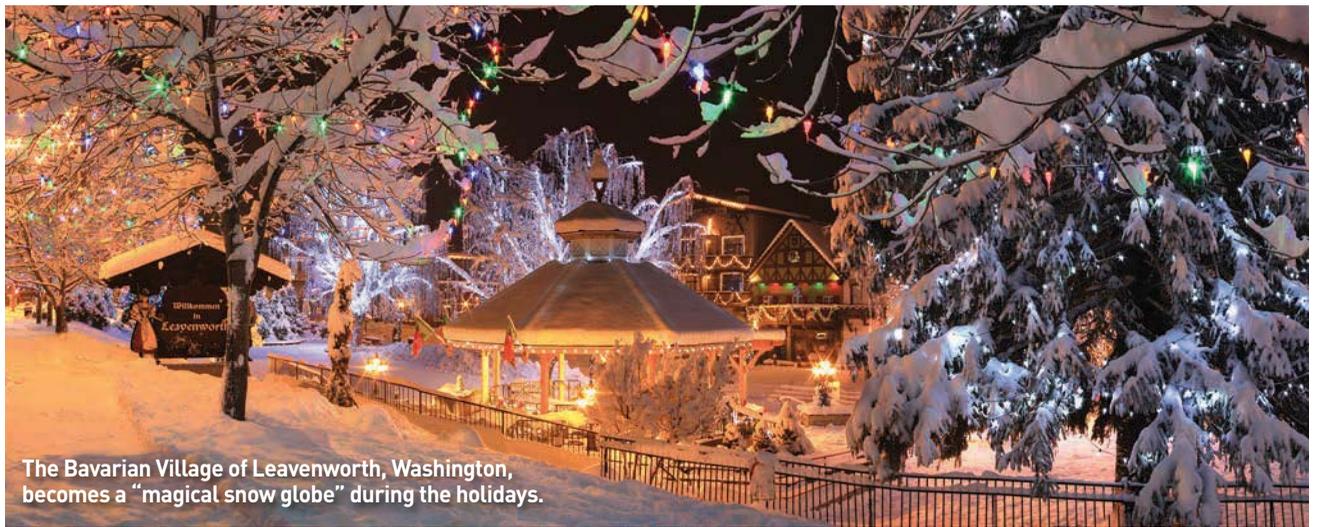
TENNESSEE

Elvis Presley's rock 'n' roll rendition of "Blue Christmas" will surely take on new meaning if you experience the holiday at "The King's" Graceland in Memphis (www.elvis.com/2013_christmas.aspx).

"Christmas with Elvis at Graceland was always something very special.

PHOTO COURTESY ELVIS PRESLEY ENTERPRISES, INC.





The Bavarian Village of Leavenworth, Washington, becomes a “magical snow globe” during the holidays.

Elvis enjoyed Christmas, which was usually a special time for him and his family, friends and staff. Elvis’ generous nature was especially evident during the season of giving, with checks and expensive gifts for the people in his life, and annual donations to a long list of Memphis-area charities,” commented Alicia Dean, public relations coordinator, Elvis Presley Enterprises.

In 2013, the Graceland staff continues Elvis’ Christmas decorating traditions inside and out, including bringing out the red holiday draperies and setting up his front lawn displays. The lights and decorations will start on November 22 with the annual Graceland Lighting Ceremony and stay in place through January 8th, Elvis’ birthday.

RV accommodations include:

Agricenter RV Park, Memphis, 901-355-1977, www.agricenter.org/rvpark.html

Elvis Presley Blvd. RV Park, Memphis, 901-332-3633, www.elvispresleyblvdvrvpark.com

Memphis-Graceland RV Park & Campground, 866-571-9236, www.elvis.com/graceland/rv_park_and_campgrounds.aspx

WASHINGTON

Nestled in Washington state’s Cascade Mountains, the Bavarian Village of Leavenworth (www.leavenworth.org) holds an annual Christmas Lighting Festival with more than 250,000 lights

that has been compared to a “magical snow globe” and made it a well-sought-out holiday destination in the Pacific Northwest.

Leavenworth Christmas Lighting Festival operates with lights and activities during the first three weekends in December (December 6-8, 13-15, 20-22 for 2013). In between the weekend lighting festivals, lights are displayed and Christmas music played in the streets from Monday-Thursday as well.

“Leavenworth is the ‘quintessential’ holiday town. Our Bavarian village transforms itself into a virtual snow globe of Christmas magic. We welcome our visitors with roasting chestnuts, holiday characters, old-fashioned caroling, horse-drawn sleigh rides and over a quarter million lights that truly brings a feeling of wonder, and has earned us national recognition as the best Christmas town in the USA,” commented Jessica Robinson, media director, Leavenworth Chamber of Commerce.

Nearby RV sites include:

Alpine View RV Park & Campground, Leavenworth, 509-548-8439, www.alpineviewrvpark.com

Pine Village KOA, Leavenworth, 509-

548-7709, www.leavenworthkoa.com (for 2013, open until December 31)

Thousand Trails, Leavenworth, 509-763-2020, www.thousandtrails.com

WEST VIRGINIA

Travelers to Wheeling will find multiple fun tourist activities year-round — from the Wheeling Suspension Bridge that’s known by locals as the “true gateway to the West” to the Wheeling Island Hotel, Casino & Racetrack. The city is 60 miles from Pittsburgh, 120 miles outside Columbus and 150 miles from Cleveland. At Christmastime, Wheeling also becomes home to one of America’s largest holiday light shows with the Winter Festival of Lights at Oglebay Resort (800-624-6988, www.oglebay-resort.com). The eco-friendly lights go on this year on November 8 and continue through January 5, 2014. The light show covers more than 300 acres over a 6-mile drive throughout the resort.

Nearby RV accommodations include:

Barkcamp, Belmont, Ohio, 740-484-4064, www.ohiostateparks.org

Dallas Pike Campgrounds, Valley Grove, 304-547-0940

Utica Shale RV Park, Belmont, Ohio, 740-238-0957,

www.uticashalervpark.com 📞

CAMPGROUND INFORMATION

Looking for an RV park open during the winter months? Here are two helpful sites to make for an easier search: www.trailerlifedirectory.com, www.gocampingamerica.com

LAND BETWEEN

This National Recreation Area in Kentucky and Tennessee offers an outdoor pl

Ruggedly beautiful “Land Between the Lakes” (LBL) in western Kentucky and Tennessee is a boot-shaped limestone ridge between rocky shores lapped by the silver-blue waters of Kentucky Lake to the west and Lake Barkley to the east. It is a world of thick woods and wide-open grassy fields, steep hills and deep valleys, meandering rural roads and trails, and hundreds of stunning high-up lake vistas.

Not surprisingly, these hilly 170,000 acres, part of a region once called the “Garden of the West,” are home to a host of animals: the expected gray and red squirrels, the not-so-common flying squirrels (adorable little masked rodents that don’t really fly — they glide), possums, raccoons and other small critters, as well as reintroduced herds of white-tailed and fallow deer.

Magnificent bison (whose bovine ancestors once roamed Kentucky in large numbers but had disappeared by 1800) and elk (similarly, gone a few years later) have also been reintroduced and now enjoy many hundreds of grassy acres to graze on.

Bobcats and black bears live on the LBL, as do red wolves, though these you’ll see only at the Nature Station, as the beautiful canids were declared biologically extinct in the wild more than 30 years ago (now red wolf/coyote hybridization programs keep the line going).

The LBL is a birder’s paradise, with more than 240 species — song birds, waterfowl, shore birds and raptors — that live here or migrate through. Among them are wild turkeys, once gone from the LBL but reintroduced from elsewhere, and a resident population of more than 150 bald eagles, elegant creatures with an amazing recovery story of their own to tell.

The LBL also offers glimpses into the history of the humans who have called the land home. The earliest were the mammoth and mastodon hunters alive more than 7,000 years ago. Visitors get a better look at the sturdy pioneers who settled this land a mere two centuries ago, after the previously called “Land Between the Rivers,” a slim rectangle framed by the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers, was

opened to White settlement in 1818.

No one lives on the U.S.-Forest-Service-managed LBL today — it’s been a national recreation area for nearly 50 years — but a dozen or so cemeteries with age-old headstones tell cursory tales, and an 85-acre (originally 500-acre) historic farm with more than a dozen original log buildings interprets life here in 1850.

All these attractions and others can be accessed from The Trace, a fine two-lane asphalt road that winds a 60-mile serpentine route along the LBL’s spine, arcing over the hills and at every turn revealing yet another elegant panorama. The drive itself is especially inviting in fall (late October to early November) — the time of my husband, Guy’s, and my recent visit — after Mother Nature has performed her annual sorcery on the thick stands of hardwood trees and underbrush, transforming even the willowy grasses to shimmering gold.

Hickories and maples are turned bright yellow, lighting the woods like glowing lanterns; frilly sumacs look like low-burning wildfires and sweet gum trees show off their multicolored garb. But here it’s the oaks that put on the most dramatic display of all: post oaks, their leaves the shiny brown of polished jasper; white oaks showy with leaves turned various shades of pumpkin, peach and tangerine; and black oaks flaunting the brightest glossy-red and rich burgundy attire we’d ever seen. Though the LBL offers many enticements, the fall color alone is enough to justify making the drive.

Despite its relatively small size, the area is webbed with more than 400 miles of roads (of which about 150



(Above left) The Home Place is a farm of the 1850s typical of the area. Re-enactors demonstrate antique skills there. (Above right) RVs camp between the trees at Energy Lake Campground. (Right) Fall woods mirrored in Cedar Pond, just off The Trace.

THE LAKES

ayground of trails, wildlife and first-rate campgrounds



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LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES

miles are paved), 200 miles of hiking and biking trails, 100 miles of off-road vehicle trails, and is bordered by some 300 miles of pristine shoreline. The forest service runs four first-rate campgrounds — Piney, Hillman Ferry, Wranglers and Energy Lake — with nearly 1,000 wooded campsites (there are also five primitive campgrounds, unlimited back-country camping and 22 boat ramps).

Such a difference a century can make. Visitors to the Land Between the Rivers (LBR), as the LBL was originally called, would have come on a very different scene in 1912: miles of shorn forest, cut to feed the greedy appetites of the iron smelters, which had begun operating here in 1820 (the LBR was rich in iron ore as well as limestone and trees, all ingredients necessary to the process) and a decade later made Kentucky third in the country in iron production.

The smelters were shut down by Union troops during the Civil War. Several later reopened, each smelter gobbling an acre of forest a day, nearly exhausting the supply. Finally, outdated, no-longer-cost-effective methods and lack of trees for charcoal extinguished the last of the furnaces 100 years ago.

Into the 1930s no bridges crossed the rivers into the LBR, where only three farms in 100 had electricity. But

as part of his New Deal, newly elected President Franklin Roosevelt created the Tennessee Valley Authority, which would build hydro-electric dams to “harness” the Tennessee River.

Part of the plan was to also create 65,000-acre Kentucky Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge, for which the government began buying up land, with the first purchases made in the 1930s.

Over the next 30 years, the rest of the land was acquired and thousands of families were obliged to leave their homes as the reservoirs for Kentucky Lake on the Tennessee River and later Lake Barkley on the Cumberland were filled. Kentucky Woodlands was absorbed into Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area, managed by the Forest Service since 1999.

Welcome Centers offering souvenirs, maps and literature greet visitors at the north and south ends of The Trace, which stretches nearly from Grand Rivers, Kentucky, to Dover, Tennessee. In between are the Woodlands Nature Station; Elk and Bison Prairie; Golden Pond Visitor Center, Planetarium and Observatory; and a working 19th-century farm called The Homeplace.

Our three-day visit began at the north end (with picturesque Energy Lake Campground as our home base, where we left the fifth-wheel parked for the duration). After a quick stop



Great Western Iron Furnace, opened in 1856, is the best preserved of the two remaining furnaces on the LBL.

at the Welcome Center, we drove to Woodlands Nature Station, which includes a small natural history museum with exhibits that explain the area's plant and animal life. Indigenous fish, turtles, snakes and flying squirrels are on display in tanks and cages.

Outside, past a butterfly garden, a path winds among 7 acres of roomy enclosures where other animals — red wolves, deer, turkeys, a red-tailed hawk and a black vulture (with a face like a Halloween mask) — can be seen. Public Program Coordinator Carrie Szwed says all these creatures were either orphaned or injured, or for some other reason could not be returned to the wild.

Just west of the nature station is Center Furnace Trail, a path through the woods where the community of Hematite once stood. Today, the collapsed town cistern; a towering 150-year-old white oak that somehow escaped the ax; and the massive stack of the old iron smelter are all that remain. Leaf-strewn excavations are the only evidence that dozens of other buildings were here, and the roar of the furnace has long been silenced.

But placards tell its story. Built in 1852, one of eight smelters on the LBR, Center was once “in blast” 24 hours a day, up to 10 months a year. Every day in operation it gorged on two tons of limestone, 30 tons of iron ore and 2,000 bushels of charcoal. By the time the furnace shut down in 1912, some 20 square miles of timber had been cut to make charcoal to feed its flames.

Ahead along The Trace is 700-acre

(Below left) Rob Milner shows off the new telescope at the Golden Pond Visitor Center Observatory. (Below right) On the other side of LBL technology, Rob Smith, an interpreter at The Home Place, makes a chair leg on an antique wooden spring lathe.





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LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES

Elk and Bison Prairie, a habitat restoration project to show how the land looked when Native Americans used fire to maintain prairie grasses. Visitors pay a small fee to drive the winding road in hopes of seeing some of the residents. We struck out at midday, and were told later that the best times to see the animals (and then usually from afar) are early morning and near dusk.

We fared better the next day at South Bison Range, where about 50 of the animals have 200 more acres to graze on. A stout wire fence keeps them in, but allows visitors to exit their vehicles and get a close-up look at these awesome beasts.

On to Golden Pond Visitor Center, a first-rate facility with dozens of exhibits, maps, historic photos and artifacts that explain the region's long history — from Paleo-Indian times, through the centuries to the European explorers who traded with the Native Americans, to the early days of White settlement and the disputed border between Kentucky and Tennessee, on through the "harnessing" of the twin rivers to create the magnificent recreation area of today.

A planetarium and observatory are also here. At the 84-seat theater, which includes a 40-foot dome, visitors, for a small fee, can watch shows (five a day are offered for various age levels) on topics such as space exploration, the planets and the night sky among others. Planetarium Manager Rob Milner also showed us through the observatory out back, built half a century ago, but recently outfitted



Woodlands Nature Center cares for (from left to right) a tiny Screech owl, an injured red-tailed hawk and a turkey vulture that lost half a wing and is now a permanent resident.

with a brand-new telescope, he says.

The Homeplace 1850 Interpretive Center is a dozen miles south. Here in a peaceful, welcoming setting visitors walk through the past at a rambling antebellum farm that fills a wide valley and includes 16 historic log buildings. Gauzy arcs of blue smoke rise from the two stone chimneys of the large dog-trot house, and life goes on as it would have more than a century-and-a-half ago.

Re-enactors dressed in period clothing are at work — the activities vary according to season — spinning and sewing, making baskets, hoeing the kitchen garden or plowing a field (with Proctor the white mule or docile Percherons Bob and Jack pulling the plow), splitting rails for fencing, making wood shingles or furniture, stripping tobacco and preparing meals using crops typical of the era.

Everything is in keeping with the times, meaning the up-to-date visitor

center can't be seen from the farm. A 13-minute film tells the story of the land and the descendants of Scots-Irish immigrants who settled it, and exhibits depict the lifestyle in different seasons.

Our last stop, at the suggestion of Belinda Gibson of the Golden Pond Visitor Center, was at St. Stephen's Catholic Church, once one of many in the area, but now the only church left.

A placard outside explains that it was built in 1900 with the final service held 45 years later. Remote, it was overlooked and allowed to remain when the LBL was formed, but by 2000 it had become badly deteriorated. Photos show the "before" and work in progress, as a group called Land Between the Rivers Inc. in an agreement with the Forest Service restored the old frame German-Catholic church. The names on gravestones in the cemetery reflect its heritage.

Now, more than a million visitors a year come to the LBL for the many outdoor activities offered along its miles. But only here at the church and at a few small, forlorn cemeteries, a re-created farm and two stone stacks remaining from iron smelting days is there evidence that once hundreds of families called the land home. 🚗



Buffalo roam on the 200-acre South Bison Range.

WHEN YOU GO

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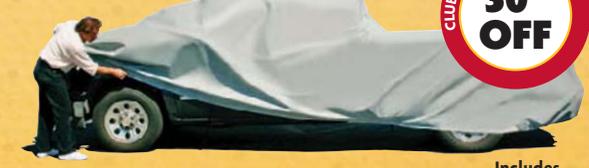
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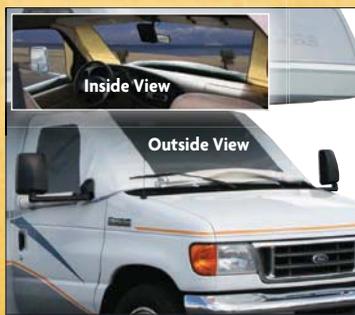
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HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS

Discover miles and miles of old-growth forest, waterfalls, scenic overlooks and elevation changes in Tennessee and North Carolina's world-renowned national park

article and photos by **James Richardson**

With more than 9 million visitors annually, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park can still boast of being the most-visited national park in the system. Its proximity to the highest concentration of the U.S. population and the absence of an entrance fee certainly adds to its appeal, but the main reasons for

the high attendance are the natural beauty, its activities and the attractions of the gateway cities, Pigeon Forge, Gatlinburg, Sevierville and Townsend on the Tennessee side and Cherokee on the North Carolina side. Living close to the Smokies, I've discovered some wonderful places to explore, both inside and outside, and up high and way down low.

ON THE OUTSIDE

There are a host of outdoor activities in the national park. Hiking on any of the 800 miles of trails is probably the most enjoyed and participated in outdoor recreation. Some of the favorite destinations for hikers are the many waterfalls in the Smokies, like Abrams Falls in the Cades Cove Loop, Grotto and Rainbow falls accessible via a moderately short hike from the Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail, Laurel Falls along the Little River Road, and Indian Creek and Toms Branch Falls in the Deep Creek area. Even though the water may look inviting, swimming is not recom-





mended in the park due to numerous hazards.

Scenic overlooks and mountain peaks are also favored points of interest for hikers. Clingmans Dome and Newfound Gap provide great vistas from which to admire the scenic beauty of the Smokies. Picnic areas — like the Chimneys, Cades Cove and Greenbrier — offer a splendid setting to enjoy a family meal at the same time as taking in another spot's uniqueness.

Horseback riding and auto touring are also favored ways of getting to the park's sights. For cars, there are 384 miles of road to choose from in the Smokies. Most connect important or



(Left) Brilliant fall colors make cruising along the Little River Road a delight. **(Above)** The water-powered gristmill at the Old Mill Restaurant in Pigeon Forge. The mill was built on the Little Pigeon River to produce food in the early 1800s for the Great Smoky Mountains settlers.

historical points of interest or provide convenient routes through the park. During the autumn color season, visitors will crowd these routes to admire the magnificent spectacle of nature's changing seasons. The major routes through the Smokies are Newfound Gap Road and Little River Road. Newfound Gap Road crosses the park connecting Gatlinburg on the Tennessee side with Cherokee in North Carolina. At an elevation of 5,046 feet, Newfound Gap is the lowest drivable pass through Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The elevation change driving from Gatlinburg to Cherokee, or vice versa, is 3,000 feet. From the Newfound Gap area, a road leads to Clingmans Dome, which at 6,643 feet, is the highest point in Great Smoky Mountains National Park and in Tennessee.

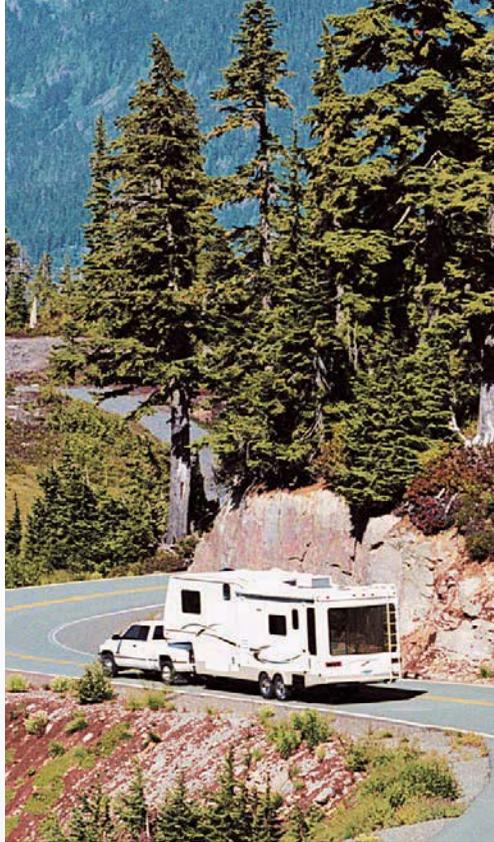
Little River Road connects the Sugarlands Visitor Center to Cades Cove by following the Little River through the park. The Sugarlands Visitor Center is the most-visited center in this most-visited park. Travelers can acquire information on the sights, attractions and camping in the park, along with checking on trail and road conditions. During the

winter months, some of the roads may be closed, especially Newfound Gap Road. At Sugarlands there is a short educational hike to one of the park's waterfalls — Cataract Falls. The short ranger-led hike is easy and less than a mile round trip.

If you're a recreational fisherman, the waters are populated with trout and bass in more than 700 miles of fishable streams in the park. If viewing wildlife is on your to-do list, Cades Cove, Roaring Fork and Cataloochee are places where black bears and whitetail deer frequent and are seen on a regular basis.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is known as the "wildflower national park." There will be a variety of plants blooming at any time of the year, but spring and summer are the peak seasons for spectacular displays of wildflowers along roads and trails.

Of course, no visit to Pigeon Forge and the Smokies would be complete without visiting the award-winning theme park, Dollywood. There are amusement park rides — including several roller coasters — restaurants, and music in the country, bluegrass, classic rock 'n' roll and Southern gospel varieties.



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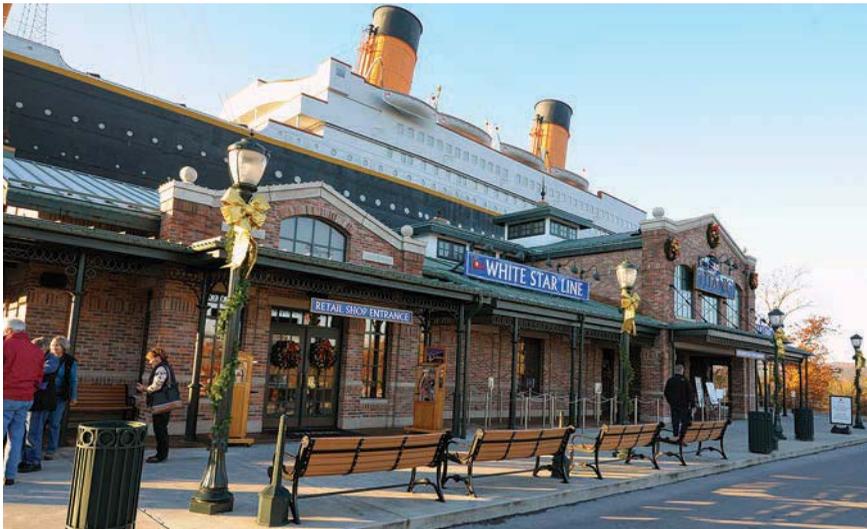
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HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS



(Above) The Titanic Museum Attraction has many original artifacts from the 1912 disaster.

ON THE INSIDE

When the weather gets too cold or too rainy, or during the evening hours, there will almost always be an attraction going on inside. In Pigeon Forge, there are many theaters that have Branson-like shows taking place. Some are dinner shows with performances while visitors are enjoying a great meal. One of the most popular takes place at the Dixie Stampede, which is a production of Dollywood, the company and theme park originated by Dolly Parton, a product of the nearby East Tennessee town of Sevierville. The shows at the Dixie Stampede always involve horses

and horsemanship and finger-licking-good meals. Other dinner shows are the Hatfield and McCoy Dinner Show, the Lumberjack Feud and the Smith Family Dinner Theater.

Some of the newer attractions in Pigeon Forge are the Titanic Museum Attraction and the Hollywood Wax Museum. The Titanic Museum Attraction contains artifacts from the incredible disaster of 1912. The Hollywood Wax Museum features celebrity likenesses preserved in wax.

The Tennessee Museum of Aviation is located in Sevierville and opened in December 2001. The 50,000-square-foot facility is located beside the runway

Some of our favorite personalities are preserved in the Hollywood Wax Museum in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.



One of the unique features of the Aquarium of the Smokies is its moving beltway through a water tunnel.



HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS



(Above left) Tuckaleechee Caverns beneath the foothills of the Smokies is estimated to be between 20 and 30 million years old. (Above middle) This UH34G Helicopter housed at the Tennessee Museum of Aviation in Sevierville saw action in several wars. (Above right) Also in the museum is the Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame paying honor to those who have served.

of the Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge Airport and houses some of the fighter planes, or Warbirds, of World War II and of the Vietnam era. It traces aviation history from before the Wright Brothers and includes the timelines of military aviation and Tennessee aviation history.

Gatlinburg has a number of inside attractions for the entire family. One of the most visited of those is the Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies. A website

claim is that "there are more fish in the aquarium than there are people living in the entire town of Gatlinburg" (www.ripleyaquariums.com/gatlinburg). A unique feature of the aquarium is its Shark Lagoon, which is a moving 340-foot-long beltway that takes visitors through an underwater tunnel (believe it or not!). It provides a close-up view of many large fish and other ocean-dwelling creatures, including sharks.

UP HIGH

Pull off the main roads of the park and you'll see spectacular vistas from many high places, such as Clingmans Dome and Newfound Gap. There's Morton's Overlook just across the Tennessee border into North Carolina. Or hike up to Mount LeConte for a spectacular panoramic view.

In Gatlinburg, visitors can hop on the Sky Lift that makes the 500-foot



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ascent to the top of Crockett Mountain. From the peak visitors get another panoramic look at the city of Gatlinburg and its surrounding mountains. Within the city of Gatlinburg the Space Needle is a 400-foot observation tower that provides a 360-degree view of the Great Smoky Mountains and the city. It is all about the view.

Another option is Ober Gatlinburg, an aerial tramway carrying visitors to a mountaintop playland. It's described as "a mountain of fun for the whole family," offering activities like an Alpine slide, wildlife encounter, indoor ice skating rink, a carousel, Blue Cyclone Rapids, mini golf and arcade, and other entertainment. In the winter, snow skiing, snowboarding and snow tubing draws in lots of people. There are also games, shops and a restaurant inside the complex.

DOWN LOW

Townsend, the gateway city on the "quiet side of the Smokies," is less commercialized, yet provides all necessary amenities and access to the northwestern edge of the Smokies. It contains previously mentioned Cades Cove, a community of historic buildings set in a highland valley. An 11-mile one-way driving loop winds through the settlement of Cades Cove, which allowed us to stop at the

A ski lift at Ober Gatlinburg takes visitors to the top of the mountain for a brilliant view of autumn foliage and a mountaintop playground.





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HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS

various cabins and churches.

While in the Townsend area, we couldn't pass up a visit to the Tuckaleechee Caverns to get the low-down on the Smokies. Tours are available at \$12 per person. We got a historical perspective of the cave from its discovery and development, and heard a few tales about its past residents and visitors. After descending 87 steps, we saw the formations of stalactites and stalagmites. The most impressive features of Tuckaleechee are its two very large rooms and the 200-foot Silver Falls.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park offers plenty of opportunity for outdoor recreation, abundant wildlife viewing, spectacular scenery, inside attractions, shopping and restaurants, and camping facilities.

CAMPING INFORMATION

For the 2013 camping season, nine campgrounds within Smoky Mountain National Park offer sites to accommodate RVs but none have water or electric hookups. Campgrounds have restrooms with flush toilets, and each site has a fire grate and picnic table.

www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/eatingsleeping.htm

You'll need to stay at campgrounds outside the park if you want RV hookups.

www.smokymountains-rv-campgrounds.com 🚐

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Great Smoky Mountains National Park
www.nps.gov/grsm

Dixie Stampede

Pigeon Forge, Tennessee
<http://pigeon-forge.dixiestampede.com>

Dollywood

Pigeon Forge, Tennessee
800-365-5996, www.dollywood.com

Tennessee Museum of Aviation

Sevierville, Tennessee
866-286-8738, www.tnairmuseum.com

Titanic Museum Attraction

Pigeon Forge, Tennessee
800-381-7670
www.titanicpigeonforge.com

Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies

Gatlinburg, Tennessee
888-240-1358
www.gatlinburg.ripleyaquariums.com

Tuckaleechee Caverns

Townsend, Tennessee
865-448-2274
<http://tuckaleecheecaverns.com>

Carter Shields Cabin, built in the 1830s, is the last homestead along the 11-mile loop road through popular Cades Cove.





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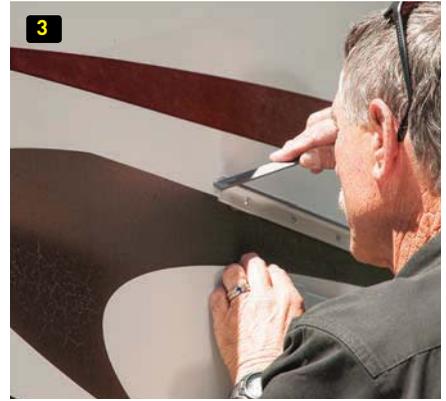
This is only an outline of the plan's features. Please read your plan description carefully to understand all the services available to you as well as any items, conditions or limitations. Offer available to first-time buyers only. Offer expires December 31, 2013. GTA25887 0813

Slideout Protection

Installing a Dometic SlideTopper Deluxe keeps the elements at bay

Slideout awnings have become a popular RV accessory in recent years, and for some very good reasons. A slideout awning helps avoid having dirt and debris pulled into the living space when the slideout is retracted, and also helps deflect sun and rain when it's extended. If your RV is not equipped with a slideout awning from the factory, the good news is that you can install one in as little as two hours to add another layer of protection from the elements.





(1) It's best to mount the awning rail using silicone rubber sealant rather than putty tape. The bead of silicone rubber follows the previously marked pencil line. **(2)** With the silicone rubber in place, use three people to assist in installing the awning rail. Gently press into place and install the supplied screws. Wipe off excess sealant at this time. **(3)** Filing the awning rail entry point before installing the SlideTopper fabric will prevent the vinyl fabric from getting hung up and/or damaged.

For this project, we installed a Dometic SlideTopper Deluxe on a fifth-wheel that was never originally equipped with a slideout awning. The Deluxe version features vinyl fabric and a white vinyl weathershield that protects the material from the sun while rolled up. The fabric is waterproof, and with the weathershield wrap, can withstand many years of outdoor exposure. A more expensive version, the SlideTopper Elite, offers a metal weathershield for even greater protection and durability.

Before ordering the SlideTopper, a few accurate measurements must be taken. SlideToppers are available from 66 to 192 inches, so to get the right size fabric, the first step is to measure the width of the slide from edge to edge. The Dometic SlideTopper can be installed on slideouts with a maximum extension of 44 inches; arms and hardware are available in four colors.

To begin the project, unpack the SlideTopper, then locate and mark the center on both the awning rail and the slideout. The instructions call for 6-7 inches of

clearance from the bottom of the awning rail to the center of the mounting bracket. Because there was a window in the way, we had to reduce that clearance to about 4½ inches, which actually presented no problems. The reason for the dimension is to provide slope to the fabric when it's extended to allow moisture to run off. Even if the fabric has to be mounted fairly level because of obstructions, the weight of the moisture will cause the fabric to sag and will likely run off anyway. It's still beneficial to have a slideout awning versus going bare even if exact clearances cannot be met.

We used a good quality silicone rubber sealant and fastened the railing with the provided screws. Some installers prefer to apply putty tape, but using silicone rubber has the added benefit of "gluing" the railing to the wall and provides additional sealing for the screws. Filing the opening will prevent the fabric from hanging up when sliding into the railing.

From here, one end is prepped for installation of the fabric roller tube assembly (FRTA). The mounting brackets

(4) After prepping the entry point of the awning rail, enlist the help of another person to feed the SlideTopper assembly into the awning rail. **(5)** Following the manufacturer's directions, install the right-hand mounting bracket with the supplied screws. Be sure to apply silicone rubber onto the surface where the mounting bracket is to be placed. **(6)** Install the Hex extension bar using the supplied rivet into the right-hand casting before inserting into the mounting bracket.



Slideout Protection

(7) Mount the left-hand bracket following the same measurements as the right-hand bracket. (8) The Hex extension bar should insert into the mounting bracket without any binding. (9) Rivet the left-hand Hex extension bar after the SlideTopper has been centered over the slideout room. (10) After the SlideTopper is centered, install the supplied screws through the mounting bracket into the Hex extension bar.

are attached to both the upper left and right corners of the slideout. You will need to follow the directions carefully, since individual brackets have their own specific guidelines.

Next, carefully place the FRTA on a padded surface to prevent damage, install the left-hand extension arm into the appropriate assembly and rivet together. Dometic supplies all hardware necessary for complete installation with the exception of sealant.

At this point, you will need two ladders and two friends. Unwrap one roll of fabric and slide the fabric into the prepped end of the awning rail far enough so that the arm extension goes beyond the mounting bracket. Insert the arm extension into the mounting bracket and install the other extension through the arm into the mounting bracket. Secure with the supplied pop rivet.

Center the SlideTopper on the slideout and install a #10, $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch screw through the bracket and into the extension arm on both sides. Remove the cotter pins from both ends of the



FRTA and run the slide in and out several times to ensure that everything is working properly. Be sure that the SlideTopper is still centered, then install the #6, $\frac{7}{16}$ -inch TEK screws into the awning rail, 2 inches from each end to prevent the fabric from shifting inside the awning rail. Lastly, install the anti-billow stop and brackets.

The Dometic SlideTopper is a great way to add protection and comfort to

your RV. Prices range from around \$150 to \$400, depending on size. For example, Camping World sells a 10-foot SlideTopper Deluxe for \$296.99 (club price); add \$71 for the Elite model. Camping World's online calculator will help you find the right price for your rig. 🗨️

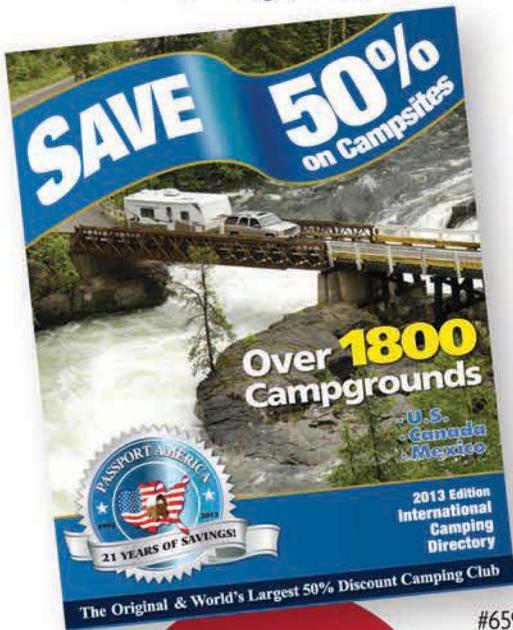
For information and ordering visit www.dometic.com or www.campingworld.com

(11) Remove the cotter pins that hold spring tension on both sides of the SlideTopper before attempting to operate. (12) Double-check all measurements and installation before testing the slideout awning. (13) The SlideTopper fabric should be taut when the slideout is fully extended. If not, you may need to add more tension to the right- and left-hand spring assemblies.



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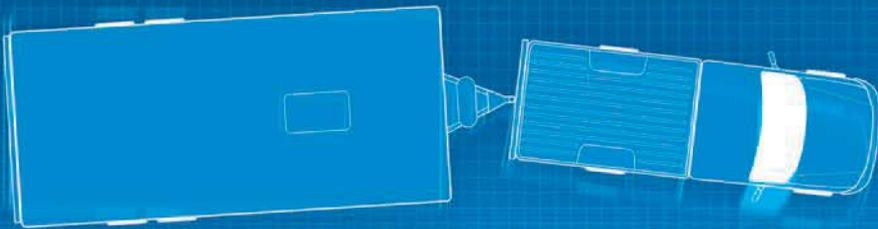
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NO SWAY

Instruction and equipment for keeping trailers under control when towing

When a truck and trailer are properly matched and connected using the right hitch and related equipment, it's sometimes easy to forget that you're actually towing.

This is not the case for the driver who experiences trailer sway. Not only are such drivers mindful of the trailer, they are reminded constantly of the trailer's presence because of the extra effort required just to keep the combination under control.

Trailer sway is not something that a trailer enthusiast should live with. Beyond a momentary emergency, proper setup and attention to safe towing practices can control trailer sway. If a driver is experiencing trailer sway, immediate attention must be given to correct the set of circumstances that result in this unruly behavior by the tow vehicle and trailer combination.

Trailer sway is the condition in which there is excessive lateral hinging at the connection point between the tow vehicle and trailer. The resulting action is what RVers often call "tail wagging the dog." The motion is sometimes rhythmic, but

it can also be totally erratic, repetitive, unpredictable and generally scary. There are several causes for trailer sway, most of which can be addressed by proper vehicle set up.

The most common cause for sway is an improperly balanced trailer that can be negatively impacted by improper loading. Many people have seen overloaded tow vehicles and assumed that the problem was too much hitch weight. So, they load more weight behind the axles of the trailer, which can be the worst thing to do if proper weight distribution is not maintained. Generally speaking, a minimum of 10-12 percent of the trailer weight should be on the ball to keep the trailer tracking safely.

Other reasons for trailer sway include exceeding the tow capacity of the tow vehicle, underinflated tires, excessive speed for the road conditions and crosswinds from weather or truck traffic. Whatever the cause, trailer sway can be a dangerous driving condition and should be addressed as a top priority.

Begin by making sure that the tow vehicle has enough tow capacity to

accommodate the cargo in the tow vehicle and the weight of the loaded trailer. The driver must make sure that the distribution of cargo in both tow vehicle and trailer is correct in relation to the vehicle axles.

Next, the driver should ensure that both tow vehicle and trailer are in proper operating condition. Of particular interest in addressing sway are tire inflation, suspension, steering and brakes, including trailer brakes and trailer brake controller. Proper operation of the tow vehicle's integral sway control system (for the most recent models, this feature is part of the vehicle's engine and chassis management systems), should be verified when the vehicle is serviced.

The final area of concern for proper vehicle towing set up, and the most critical, is the trailer hitch system. Most vehicles are properly equipped for conventional towing only when they are equipped with weight distribution (WD) hitches, and often, vehicle manufacturers specify that weight distribution should also be accompanied by sway control.

Weight distribution hitches can be





very effective at reducing the leverage affect of the trailer coupler on the hitch ball by distributing a percentage of that weight to the tow vehicle's front axle instead of just loading the back axle. This allows the tow vehicle's suspension and steering to operate as designed. An "unloaded" front suspension that's riding too high due to excess hitch weight out back can create tow vehicle instability as well as aggravate a trailer sway condition. The WD hitch helps load the front axle properly.

Weight distribution can help address sway, however, it's not usually designed to do so with the same purpose found in sway control systems, which specifically focus on lateral movement.

Sway control systems address lateral hinging by introducing resistance to that particular type of movement. This is done in three general ways. The first is by creating friction in a diagonal brace to slow down and resist the sway movement.

The second general approach, usually referred to as active sway control, uses WD hitch spring bar mechanisms designed for this purpose, creating spring resistance not only to slow down the movement, but also to store energy that actually pushes the trailer back in line with the tow vehicle.

The third method is to shift the pivot point from behind the tow vehicle to a point much closer to the vehicle's rear axle. This hitch hardware can be somewhat costly and a bit heavier than the usual WD hitch but it can also be extremely effective at controlling trailer sway.

Here are some of the products specifically designed to control trailer sway, along with each manufacturer's claimed features and benefits.



Blue Ox SwayPro

The SwayPro weight distribution hitch utilizes the latest in computer-designed weight distributing technology to prevent trailer sway under heavy loads, high winds and rutted roads. Weight distribution is built into the hitch head. SwayPro is available in six hitch weights for standard and underslung couplers. SwayPro's built-in optimized sway prevention uses the geometry and tension of a four-point system to hold the trailer in line. Intelligent pitch angle of the head's design works with the steel spring bars and latch attachments to prevent sway from starting.

Easy wind-up action makes latching the chains easy and secure. The latch cannot be overloaded and you can back up without creating bind. Rotating latches eliminate noise during turning and backing. The wrap-around chain design secures chains so they don't make noise. Low profile latch bracket design is compatible with most A-frame accessories. Each spring bar snaps into place and grease is trapped inside the bar pivot head eliminating messy bar ends. No head angle adjustment

needed. An open head design makes it easy to access the hitch ball for tightening.

Blue Ox
800-228-9289, www.blueox.com



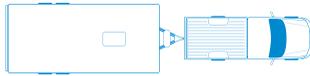
Curt Manufacturing

The 17200 kit includes the sway control unit, trailer-mounted attachment ball and bolts, hitch-mounted attachment ball, weld-on tab to adapt for left-hand use or for use without a WD hitch, mount reinforcement plate and attachment clips. The trailer-mounted 1 1/8-inch ball attachment is made especially for the 17200 sway control unit. The sway control attachment ball is 1 1/4 inches in diameter, and made with solid steel and chrome finish.

Curt
877-287-8634, www.curtmfg.com

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MANUFACTURERS

NO SWAY



Equal-i-zer Hitch

The Equal-i-zer hitch uses the 4-Point Sway Control system to resist a trailer's attempts to sway. Two points of friction are found in the hitch head through the sockets that engage the spring arms, with two additional points found at the tail of each arm where they rest on the frame-mounted Sway Control brackets. The rigid design of the Sway Control brackets eliminates the side-to-side "slop" inherent to a chain-hung weight distribution arm, which also helps to reduce trailer sway.

Narrow brackets can be positioned to avoid propane cylinders and battery rails. The Equal-i-zer hitch can be coupled and uncoupled easily, even if the trailer and tow vehicle are not

directly in line with each other, or are sitting on uneven ground. The hitch can be backed into a tight campsite or tight turn without requiring disengagement.

The Equal-i-zer hitch has a limited lifetime warranty. Models include a 4K version for use with lighter weight trailers and tow vehicles, as well as 6K, 10K, 12K and 14K models.

Equal-i-zer, 800-478-5578
www.equalizerhitch.com



Fastway e2 Hitch

The e2 hitch by Fastway Trailer Products was designed to provide sway control without having to use additional hardware, like an add-on sway bar. The e2 uses standard weight distribu-

tion bars with rigid trailer brackets to provide weight distribution. The rigid frame brackets provide two friction surfaces and eliminate "chain slop" to help reduce sway.

The e2 hitch's brackets are compatible with most trailers where a V-nose design, propane and battery compartment cowlings, or A-frame-mounted storage accessories make it difficult to mount and use a typical chain-hanger bracket.

The e2 hitch can be coupled or uncoupled easily with the tow vehicle situated at almost any angle relative to the trailer. There are no backing or turning restrictions, and no need to use or store extra hardware.

The Fastway e2 hitch has a 10-year limited warranty. It is available in two styles — trunnion and round-bar. There are five different trunnion weight ratings and four round-bar model weight ratings.

Fastway Trailer Products, 877-523-9103, www.fastwaytrailer.com

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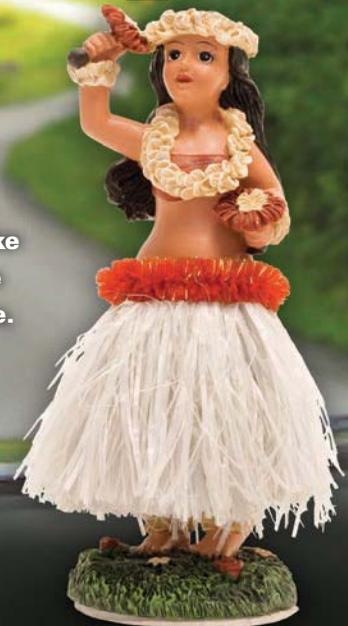
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Hensley Arrow

The Arrow was Hensley's first anti-sway trailer hitch, introduced in 1993. According to the manufacturer, the Arrow completely eliminates trailer sway through a patented linkage system. Components remain on the trailer A-frame at all times and the connection is made using a unique hitch bar. The Arrow has 20 years in the field with no sway-induced accidents. Hensley has a free hitch bar exchange program for when you change trailers or tow vehicle. It fits any trailer or tow vehicle combination, and comes with standard adjustable weight distribution jacks, snap-up brackets or hanger brackets. Lifetime warranty to the original owner.



Hensley Cub

The Hensley Cub is designed for use with trailers up to 6,000 pounds and 24 feet. The free hitch bar exchange program provides a new setup when you change trailers or vehicles. The Cub comes with standard adjustable weight distribution jacks, snap-up brackets or hanger brackets. Lifetime warranty to the original owner.

TrailerSaver, 800-410-6580
www.trailersaver.com

Husky Center Line

The Husky Center Line Weight Distribution and Sway Control System is an active sway control system designed to return the trailer to center. Compression cylinder technology and torsion spring bars work together to distribute weight and oppose trailer sway before it begins, keeping a trailer straight and on center in all driving conditions. The system comes in three models for use with trailers up to 14,000 pounds. Bar change is needed when changing trailer sizes. Limited lifetime warranty.



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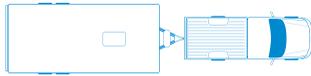
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Reese Strait-Line System

The Strait-Line Hitch consists of a patented Dual Cam High-Performance Sway Control and a High-Performance Weight Distributing System in one package. The Strait-Line Hitch was given this name as its pro-active design forces the trailer to stay in a straight line behind the tow vehicle. Sway is controlled by the Dual Cam High-Performance System. The stronger the sway force, the more the Dual Cam System works to stop it.

The Strait-Line is simple to install and adjust, fully automatic and self-centering. The spring bars feature integral sway control, and there aren't any U-bolts to interfere with LP-gas cylinder racks or other A-frame mounted items. Specific attachment reference points are provided. The hitch leads to easy adjustment of centerline, and there is no need to relocate items on top of A-Frame to install the Dual Cam. It carries a limited lifetime warranty.

Reese, 800-632-3290
www.reeseprod.com

Husky Trunnion Bar WD Hitch Package

Husky makes it easy to combine weight distribution with sway control with the Husky Trunnion Bar Weight Distribution Hitch Package. The package includes a Trunnion Bar Weight Distribution Hitch with Dual Friction Sway Control. Hitch features include a bolt-together hitch head and shank assembly that fits all Class III / IV 2-inch receivers and delivers 7.25 inches of height adjustment (rise: 7½ inches; drop: ½ inch).

The Dual Friction Sway Control brake pad system is designed to diminish sway from windy conditions and passing vehicles and is recommended for trailers longer than 16 feet.

Husky Towing Products
877-544-4449, www.huskytow.com

variety of tow vehicles, including trucks, vans and most sport utility vehicles. Models are available for towing light-weight tent campers to the largest travel trailers.

PullRite hitches are total towing solutions with the weight distribution being an integral part of the company's design to equalize hitch weight and eliminate dangerous sway.

PullRite
800-443-2307, www.pullrite.com

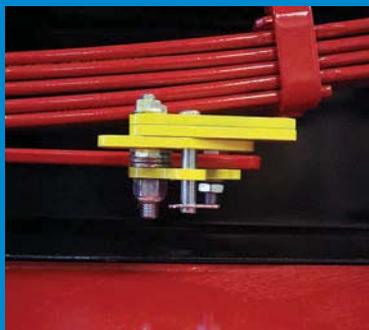


PullRite Hitch

The design of the PullRite hitch eliminates the pivot point at the trailer ball and creates a pivot point at the axle of the tow vehicle, like a fifth-wheel hitch, but it's mounted under the vehicle instead of above the axle.

The PullRite can be used for a

Torklift International Quick Disconnect StableLoad



The StableLoad by Torklift works for towing and hauling by reducing sway and improving safety and handling. The system engages and disengages from the factory suspension in seconds with a no-drill installation and works to reduce sway and body roll. Lifetime warranty backs the product and the vehicle leaf springs.

Torklift International
800-246-8132, www.torklift.com

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Winnebago Ultralite 28DDBH

A family friendly floorplan and thoughtful details are defining characteristics of this lightweight towable

“World famous” is a claim that we’ve all heard time and time again — and strangely, it’s usually applied to something that is, in actuality, relatively unknown. From chili beans to designer jeans, there aren’t many brands that are truly known the world over — but Winnebago is one of them. With the possible exception of small populations in developing countries, most of us associate the name Winnebago with the bold motorhomes that personify the RVing lifestyle.

What a lot of us don’t realize is that Winnebago actually got its start building travel trailers. In fact, that’s all Winnebago built from its inception in 1958 until 1966, when the company introduced its first motorhome product. Since then, trailers have been largely absent from Winnebago’s line — but

with the acquisition of SunnyBrook travel trailers in 2010, Winnebago was firmly back in the towable business. Its new line of Ultralite travel trailers offer the livability of some fifth-wheels at the fraction of the weight, enabling them to be towed by half-ton pickups and even some full-size SUVs. At the same time,

they offer the build quality, décor and luxurious feel that have made Winnebago motorhomes so famous.

The Ultralite is available in three floorplans, ranging from 27 feet to 31 feet. For our test, we selected the 28DDBH, a family friendly floorplan with some uncommon features. First, since most of us spend the bulk of our time in the living area, Winnebago made this area huge, courtesy of two opposing slides. In fact, there’s so much room in the area that Winnebago was able to fit an island kitchen, something you don’t often see in travel trailers. At the rear of the trailer is a





Winnebago devoted most of the interior space to the living area, which rivals some small fifth-wheels in its expanse. Galley offers plenty of working room, while the fixed dinette and optional tri-fold hide-a-bed sofa provide room to lounge.

bunkhouse with two beds large enough to house four young teenagers, as well as a bath area with its own entry door — a feature that would later become the biggest subject of debate with our staff. More on that later.

Our test route took us across Cali-

fornia's Mojave Desert and through the beautiful Owens Valley along the fabled U.S. 395. As we suspected, handling was indeed an issue once the wind started to blow; the trailer's length, combined with its relatively light weight can definitely exact some tail-wagging-the-dog action

on the tow vehicle. Fortunately, we fitted a sway control hitch in advance to mitigate any unwanted movement — and we recommend you do the same. Even with this equipment in place, concentration was required to keep the trailer on the straight and narrow.



On the outskirts of Lone Pine, we spent our time at a popular RV resort with full hook-ups. Once we arrived, setup was accomplished pretty quickly, as all of the plumbing/electrical necessities are located at the left rear of the trailer, where they should be. And, there are some useful standout features here as well, such as a light within easy reach, a black tank flush and an exterior spray port with a detachable, coiled hose and spray nozzle that's perfect for quick cleanups. At the front is a large pass-through storage compartment with optional slam-latch baggage doors (\$72) that was more than big enough for our table, chairs, generator, gas can, grill and other assorted items. A cordless drill and socket made short work of the four manual stabilizing jacks (power jacks are available) but we couldn't have lived without the 3,500-pound capacity power A-frame jack, a worthwhile investment at \$172.

Preparing a simple family meal in this trailer is easy, as the galley coun-



(Above left) Bath area is adequately sized and comes with a tub/shower suitable for kids and adults. Separate entry door allows convenient accessibility without traipsing through the living area. **(Above right)** Rear bunkhouse is roomy, but could be improved upon with a ladder and revised lighting.

tertop is roomy, and the island is huge. There's plenty of prep room at either end, and the sink is located right in the middle, perfect for two cooks. Elegant pendant lighting provides plenty of light, as does an overhead skylight, but the

latter is not always a welcome feature. Yes, it makes the area feel pleasant and airy, but when the sun is overhead and you're preparing lunch, the heat on the top of your head can get uncomfortable. A sliding sunshade here would cure this

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problem, and help keep the living area darker at night as well.

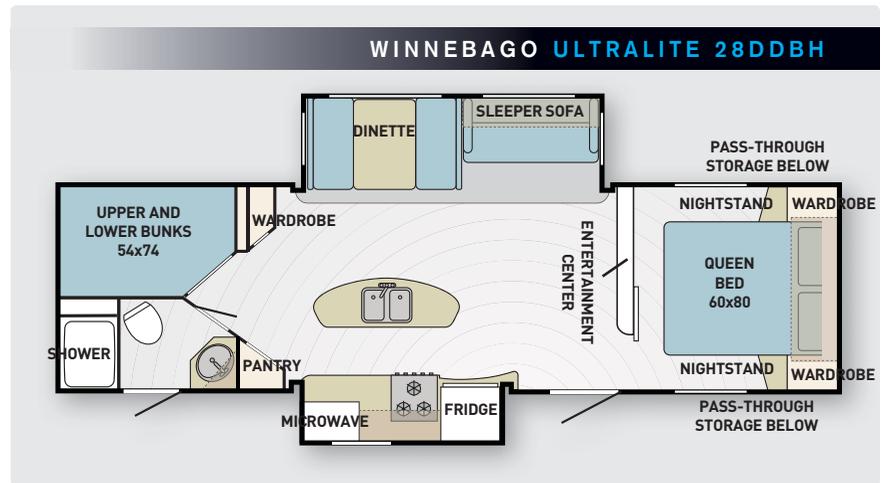
The island's cultured marble countertop got mixed reviews. Some of our staff thought it should be the same color as the textured laminate kitchen countertop, while others thought it provided a nice contrast. One thing we all agreed upon is that the beige plastic sink has to go; it looks out of place against the cultured marbletop and residential-style brushed nickel pull-out faucet.

There is plenty of storage in the galley area, both in the galley itself and underneath the kitchen island. There's also a massive pantry that is great for a large family — most small homes don't have a pantry this size. That being said, we'd gladly sacrifice a little overhead storage for a bigger microwave; the one supplied is large enough to warm a TV dinner or a small plate of food, but that's about it. Also, we'd appreciate some more organized storage underneath the island, perhaps some shelves

in the middle and trash can storage at one end, for example. Overall however, the galley is very intuitive and a pleasure to use.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the entertainment center. The test trailer was equipped with an optional 32-inch LCD HDTV (\$718) that pivots 180 degrees so it can be watched from either the living area or front

bedroom. That's the good part. The bad part is that it's mated to an automotive grade AV system, which we found cumbersome to use. For example, when watching a movie, the picture plays on both the TV and the AV system's touch screen, which is distracting. And, if watching TV in the bedroom, the remote for the AV system won't work because the unit is on the other side of the



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Direct Sat TV, Circle 108 on Reader Service Card



Pull up a chair and stay awhile. Available power awning with LED lighting makes for comfortable outdoor living both day and night.

wall. Personally, I'd rather Winnebago made the trailer AV ready with an appropriately sized slot, then it could be fitted with a proper Blu-ray player and a single remote could control the whole shooting match from either room. On the plus side, the system worked great for playing music, with built-in speakers in the living area, front bedroom and patio area. A switch on the AV unit makes it possible to play music through all the speakers, or divide them into zones, which we thought was a nice touch.

Monsoon weather had swept into the Owens Valley by nightfall, and we found ourselves grilling outdoors, under the clouds, in 85-degree weather. When the sky darkened and a light rain ensued, we were grateful for the optional

electric awning with LED lighting, a bargain at \$319. In fact, it was probably the coolest option fitted to the test unit. A strip of LEDs runs almost the entire length of the awning, and supplies plenty of soft light with the awning deployed even a few inches. With the awning closed, the lights don't shine much farther than the entry steps, so they don't become a burden to neighboring campers. And, being LEDs, they last almost forever and consume very little power — something you'll appreciate when dry camping.

Soon it was time to turn in for the evening, so we headed to the front bedroom. This area is compact, but features a walk-around 60- x 80-inch queen-size bed with small wardrobes on either side, overhead cabinets and

SPECIFICATIONS

Exterior Length	33' 10"
Exterior Width	8'
Exterior Height	10' 10"
Interior Width	7' 8"
Interior Height	6' 9"
Construction	Welded aluminum with laminated floor and side walls; aluminum roof trusses; radius roof with one-piece EPDM membrane, heated and enclosed underbelly
Freshwater Cap.	56 gals.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	33 gals.
LP-gas Cap.	10 gals.
Water Heater Cap.	6 gals.
Refrigerator	6 cu. ft.
Furnace	30,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	15,000 Btu
Converter	55 amp
Battery	Dealer supplied
Tires	ST225/75R15
Suspension	Leaf springs
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no cargo)	7,460 lbs.
Hitch Weight	740 lbs.
Axle Weight	6,720 lbs.
GVWR	9,560 lbs.
GAWR	8,800 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	2,100 lbs.
Base MSRP	\$30,000
As-Tested MSRP	\$36,614
Basic Warranty	1 year
Winnebago Industries	574-825-5250, www.winnebagoowables.com

Circle 135 on Reader Service Card

underbed storage for comforters or other bulky items. In reality, you only use the bedroom to get some shut-eye, and it works perfectly fine for this.

About the Tow Vehicle

This test fell at that time of year when one model year is outgoing, but the new models have yet to arrive. So rather than perform a full test on a truck that's almost a year old, we asked Ford if they could loan us a 2013 Ford F-150 that was capable of towing the test trailer, which had a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 9,560 pounds. Ford kindly responded with a Super-Crew 4x4 with EcoBoost, which we can tell you was more than adequate for the job at hand. Churning out an impressive 365 horsepower and 420 lb-ft of torque, the twin-turbocharged V-6, six-speed automatic transmission and Max Trailer Tow Package (which includes an integral trailer brake control and trailer sway control) bestow this particular truck with 11,200 pounds of towing capacity. In short, the truck pulled this trailer without even breaking a sweat, and did so with an almost eerie quiet. If you're seeking a full-size truck for your towing needs, definitely put this truck on your shopping list. The 2014 model isn't expected to change very much except for a few updates to select trim levels.



The rear bunkhouse, on the other hand, we're not so sure of. While there were no kids along for this test, we couldn't help but notice that Winnebago doesn't provide a way to access the top bunk, so don't forget the stepladder. The lighting isn't terribly well-conceived either; the spacing for the lights is different for the two bunks, and they're located at the foot of the beds. We understand the reasoning behind this layout, as it allows kids to turn on the lights so they can see their way into the bunk. However, once in, they can't do any reading unless they want to lay backward and on one side. A better way to do this would be to place a switch near the entry of each bunk, with the light mounted high and to the rear. Also, the top bunk is rated at only 250 pounds, which we think is a tad on the light side, considering a pair of teens sleeping up here could easily surpass this. Lastly, a curtain in this area would be a nice addition so the bunks could be darkened when the adults are still whooping it up in the living area.

The rear bath is well-suited to family duty, with a lav, medicine cabinet and even a porcelain toilet. We appreciated the fact that Winnebago saw it appropriate to fit the bathroom with a tub/shower, making it easy for parents to bathe the little ones in the family. The enclosure uses an accordion-style plastic door that worked well for the intended purpose, and there's plenty of headroom for 6-plus-footers thanks to a welcome skylight.

Now, back to that second entry door. Most of us thought it was a great idea, as it provides quick access to the bathroom when on the road. And when kids are outside exploring, they can use the bathroom without tracking dirt through the living area, something all parents can appreciate. However, some felt that having two doors on the trailer makes it look cluttered, and that they'd rather deploy the curbside slide just a bit and walk back to the bathroom when on the road. These are, of course, personal preferences. However, one thing we all thought Winnebago overlooked was a second switch for the water pump in the bathroom. When on

the road, you either have to leave the pump on or enter through the front door, turn the pump on, then enter the rear door to use the bathroom. And don't forget to turn the pump off again before returning to the tow vehicle. A simple switch in the bath area would prevent such awkwardness.

The Winnebago Ultralite comes very well equipped, especially considering its weight-saving intentions, and it does offer a number of options. In addition to

those mentioned previously, the trailer was also equipped with a tri-fold hide-a-bed sofa (\$218), tinted frameless windows (\$218), 15-inch deluxe aluminum wheels (\$363), a 15,000-Btu ducted air conditioning system (\$218; 13,000 Btu standard) and night shades (\$218).

Winnebago's return to the towable market is a welcome one, indeed, and the Ultralite series is a great choice for buyers who want a lightweight trailer that doesn't skimp on quality. 📺

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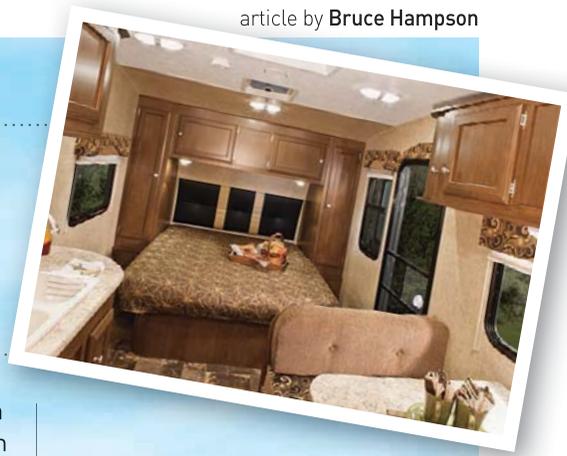
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WALK-THROUGH: VENTURE RV SONIC 190VRB

Small, Not Spartan

The Sonic 190VRB travel trailer packs in a lot of amenities and indulgences into a cozy interior



Referring to most any low-cost RV built for today's market as "entry-level" is really something of a misnomer. Granted, such rigs are, without exception, at the bottom rung of a manufacturer's product lines both in terms of size and price, but there's a reason why towables in general — and lightweight travel trailers in particular — continue to pace the RV industry's impressive comeback: Comfort.

Or, as Dave Boggs, director of sales and marketing at Venture RV, noted wryly when describing the company's new Sonic travel trailer, "It's small — but not basic."

That's an important distinction, especially for the 190VRB model shown here that stretches just 22 feet, 10 inches from bumper to coupler — or

less than \$1,000 per linear foot when subtracting the front frame extension from the actual usable living space.

Sonic is the second product line developed by Shippshewana, Indiana-based Venture RV — itself a relatively new division of longtime builder KZ RV. Five other floorplans are offered, ranging from 20 to 25 feet, with gross vehicle weight ratings from 3,000 to 4,500 pounds. Its light curb weight, combined with the trailer's 7½-foot width and use of dual axles — something fairly uncommon in this price category — allows the Sonic to be towed by a wide array of vehicles without the uncomfortable "wander" often associated with single-axle trailers.

Also uncommon for an entry-level ultralight is the Sonic's construction. Built around an exterior of color-

infused champagne-toned fiberglass, the front, roof and back are designed and installed as a single section, eliminating seams that are not only unsightly but can eventually serve as conduits for water incursion and damage. The lower front is dressed out with a diamond-plate-look panel, with black-framed windows complementing the black, white and brown graphics.

There's also an outside shower and illuminated entry steps, both standard, and, while exterior storage is limited (as might be expected in a unit of this size), the single forward storage bay runs the width of the trailer. There's substantially more storage space inside — although the first thing you really notice is the 6-foot-10-inch-high ceiling. Even when accounting



The ultra-lightweight [3,000- to 4,500-pound GVWR] travel trailer features dual axles for improved tracking and a nearly seamless exterior — the front, roof and rear are designed and installed as a single entity. (Top) Cozy Sonic interior includes a padded headboard above the bed, and bright LED lighting throughout the cabin.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VENTURE RV



(Top right) Although only one décor package is currently offered, the dinette cushions sport complementary patterns top and bottom allowing for subtle changes in appearance. (Below right) Rounded corners on cabinets give the Sonic an upscale look — an impression enhanced by the sizable refrigerator and, behind the bathroom door, a full-size neo-angle shower enclosure.



for the ceiling-mounted outlet for the standard 13,500-Btu air conditioner and light fixtures (bright LED lights are used throughout), that's still more than enough headroom for a 6½-foot-tall camper.

Though an entry-level travel trailer will never be called "expansive," cozy definitely fits here. With a queen-sized bed tucked up against the nose, the dinette rides curbside just aft of the entry door while an abbreviated galley is built into the streetside wall. Again, however, Venture has introduced a few upgrades not usually found at this price point.

The bed, for example, is ringed by the customary narrow wardrobes and cabinets — but the front wall also is home to a nicely padded headboard. Likewise, while the workhorse of the galley will doubtless be its two-burner Suburban cooktop, Venture added a convection microwave oven — and a 6.3-cubic-foot two-door refrigerator.

"What's also really nice is that, while we're only offering one interior décor package to start out, the dinette cushions are reversible," Boggs pointed out. "There's a different pattern on the backside of the cushions, so you can change the look somewhat just by flipping them."

Both cushion designs also have been incorporated into the window treatments as well as in a custom padded arch above the door to carry though on the color scheme. Venture also designed the wall-mounted cabinetry with rounded corners to afford a more upscale look, and crafted the dinette table out of the same solid, granite-look laminate used on all countertops.

While the model's \$18,995 MSRP doesn't include a TV — there is a combination CD/DVD player — the wall behind the dinette is wired and prepped to support up to a 26-inch flat-screen TV. Other options include aluminum wheels, LED



lights, power Carefree awning with LED lighting, upgraded mattress and a "highway package" consisting of spare tire, black-tank flush and LP-gas cylinder cover.

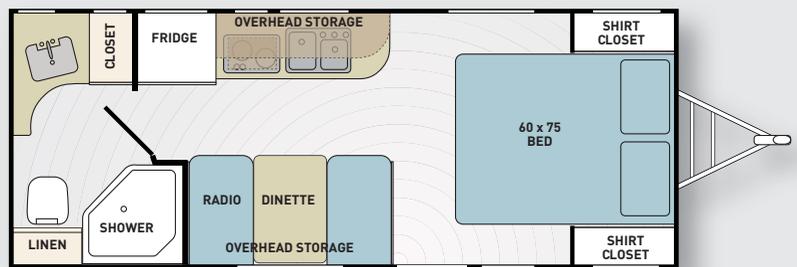
Perhaps the biggest surprise, though, is behind the rear door separating the living quarters from the bathroom. While it wouldn't be unexpected in a rig of this size to find a tiny shower stall protected by a rubberized sliding pocket door, Venture fitted the Sonic with a roomy, glass-walled neo-angle shower enclosure. The curbside shower and toilet are opposite a small vanity — sporting a cutout countertop to maximize room — and, again, additional cabinet space. There's also a small cabinet behind the toilet for bath supplies.

While the Sonic will be a wonderful introduction for many into RVing — and doubtless the company would like it to serve as a stepping stone to its larger SportTrek travel trailer line or even one of KZ RV's well-appointed fifth-wheels — there is a segment of the camping fraternity that may never outgrow it. It's hard to beat comfortable and cozy when looking for a weekend retreat. 🚐

QUICK INFO



Exterior length	22' 10"
Exterior width	7' 6"
Exterior height	10' 3"
Interior height	6' 10"
Freshwater cap.	39 gal.
Black-/gray-water cap.	24 gal./31 gal.
LP-gas cap.	10 gal.
Weight (dry)	3,530 lbs.
Hitch weight	330 lbs.
GVWR	4,500 lbs.
Base MSRP	\$18,995



Venture RV, 888-988-8440, www.venture-rv.com
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BOX TOPS

Products designed to keep your truck looking good and protect the cargo

When getting ready to hit the road, RVing is all about space. How much can I bring along? Where will it fit? And where can I store things like an AC generator or firewood that I don't necessarily want inside the trailer? The answer to that one is simple: the bed of the pickup when used as a tow vehicle. The truck bed is often the unsung hero of packing; awkward or dirty items generally wind up back there, as do many last-minute "Oops, I almost forgot!" items.

Whatever does wind up in the truck bed (keeping within the truck

and trailer's weight limits, of course) will likely need protection from the elements. And the easiest way to do so is with a truck bed cover, whether it's a tonneau cover (retractable or foldable) or even a fiberglass truck cap. A truck bed cover is a wise investment with the very fortunate side effect of improving aesthetics with sleeker lines. And although there isn't really any concrete evidence, the cover manufacturers say their products may possibly nudge up your vehicle's MPG a tad by improving aerodynamics and reducing drag.

When selecting a truck bed cover,

you need to take several things into consideration. Will you ever need to stack cargo up higher than the bedrails? Do you tow a fifth-wheel? Are you willing to drill holes in the bed, or would you prefer a no-drill installation? There are quite a few questions to ponder, but chances are you can work them out quickly.

The caps are available in a variety of configurations. Soft tonneau covers are great to provide some protection from weather, but won't necessarily be watertight and can't completely secure the contents from theft. Lockable flip-top covers offer peace of mind from grabby people, but may limit your ability to carry large, bulky items. Hard, retractable covers are a great way to provide protection and flexibility, but you often have to open your wallet a bit wider than for the others. Some hard tonneaus and caps will need to be painted to match

Access Lorado



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MANUFACTURERS

the truck's finish, which will up the cost.

Each type of truck bed cover requires a bit of maintenance. While the hard covers are generally treated the same as the truck's exterior, the softer vinyl tonneaus may eventually shrink and/or expand in the weather, which can necessitate occasional adjustment of the mounting. Also, it's important to prevent any standing water on a soft tonneau, as that could lead to staining and/or cover damage. UV light is a definite threat to soft covers (think awning) and can damage them over time. Proper care, including spray-on protectant, can help prevent damage.

To assist with your search, we've gathered a number of products that rate well in terms of craftsmanship, usability and overall value.

ACCESS

The Access Lorado Roll-Up Cover from Agri-Cover is a soft, roll-up tonneau featuring a sleek, low-profile design. The Access is fully sealed on all four sides to keep weather out, and includes what the company calls an Element Seal gasket to provide extra protection at the front of the bed. The Lorado cover's vinyl is UV-coated on both sides, offering even more weather protection.

The cover keeps your gear secure with a dual-locking system that locks and releases with one motion. The Lorado comes with premium nylon storage straps that keep it from rubbing against the cab when rolled up.

Agri-Cover
866-414-5422, www.agricover.com

ADVANTAGE

The Hard Hat from Advantage is a soft-to-the-touch vinyl tri-fold tonneau cover that features a hard, protective inner shell. The specially engineered poly-fiber panels are covered with multiple layers of exterior-grade, UV-coated, tear-resistant, weather protected vinyl that offers maximum security, according to the company. The Hard Hat's tri-fold design is simple to install and use.

Advantage Truck Accessories
800-773-3110
www.advantagetruckaccessories.com



Advantage
Hard Hat

EXTANG

The Extang EnCore Tonno hard-panel, tri-folding cover features Bolt one-key lock technology. The front panel can be coded to match the truck's ignition key (available on most models) for access from both the front and rear panels. Each Bolt lock features a six-plate tumbler sidebar, automotive-grade weather-resistant shutter and larger cylinder to ensure security. The 1-inch-thick panels on the EnCore are made of fiberglass reinforced plastic, which the company claims provides superior dent and fade resistance.

Extang Corp.
800-877-2588, www.extang.com

LEER

The 100XQ is a fiberglass truck cap with solid, one-piece expanses of tinted glass for the windows. The side windows offer a crank-out feature and screens for ventilation. The rear door features fitted hidden hinges and the exclusive LEER Twist Handle lock and automotive-style rotary latches, allowing an easy upgrade to optional keyless remote operation. The cap is finished in automotive-quality paint mixed to match the truck.

Popular options for the 100XQ include a factory-mounted Thule roof rack system, a ceiling-mounted interior gear net, an integrated locking



Extang EnCore Tonno



storage box, a three-outlet 12-volt DC Powerblock for accessories and a wide range of other storage options.

LEER's 550 Series fiberglass tonneau is a low-profile cover that is subtly curved to shed water. The 550 is equipped with some pretty impressive hardware, including the front FlexSeal that unfolds to cover the gap between truck cab and bed, and the Super Lift Assist, which is a set of articulating arms that add leverage to make opening and closing easy. The lock and latch system includes a shroud to protect lock linkage and wiring, and the 550 is factory-prepped to accept optional keyless remote operation.

LEER, 574-522-5337, www.leer.com



LEER 100XQ



Pace Edwards
Bedlocker Electric

PACE EDWARDS

Pace Edwards Retractable Truck Bed Covers provide secure storage to maximize a truck's hauling potential. Plus, the rugged no-drill installation is designed to accommodate fifth-wheel hitches, with plenty of room to store tools and additional cargo.

The Bedlocker Electric offers hands-free remote operation via a powerful electric motor that wires into the truck battery. The cover opens/closes in less than 30 seconds, and can be paused at any time. The low-profile blanket design retracts into a canister box at the front of the truck bed, and a manual override release lever provides peace of mind in case of lost remotes or dead batteries.

The JackRabbit provides owners with the traditional tonneau look plus ultimate convenience and security. The JackRabbit has a padded, weather-resistant top bonded to rigid aluminum panels, but it also offers

some additional features. The exclusive Continuous Tension Spring allows the cover to open automatically when the latch mechanism is turned, and close easily with the use of the pull strap. The JackRabbit can be locked to secure your items, and the cover can be held open/closed every 12 inches along the side rails for additional versatility.

The Full Metal JackRabbit offers the features of the JackRabbit with the additional benefit of an all-metal deck comprised of black powder-coated, aluminum panels sealed by patented silicone weather hinges.

Pace Edwards, 800-400-2806
www.pace-edwards.com

RETRAX

The PowertraxPRO retractable pickup bed cover opens and closes electronically using a key fob. Just press a button to open and close the cover, which locks in any position along the rail using an electromagnetic brake. The cover is constructed of heavy-duty aluminum slats, which are connected by flexible hinges to create a durable and weather-tight seal. The glossy black powder-coated Powertrax-PRO also has an integrated LED cargo light on the canister that is operated by the key fob, which features an auto shutoff.

Retrax
800-206-4070, www.retrax.com



Retrax PowertraxPRO



Roll-N-Lock M Series

ROLL-N-LOCK

The M Series retractable tonneau features vinyl-over-aluminum construction for increased durability. Each slat on the cover is joined by an interlocking hinge, which the company claims leads to smooth, non-binding operation, as there is no metal-to-metal contact. The cover is installed using a clamp-on track and features recessed drain fittings to prevent water build-up. M Series tonneaus also feature an integrated tailgate lock for added security.

Roll-N-Lock Corp.
800-952-7655, www.rollnlock.com



Truxedo
LoPro QT

TRUXEDO

The inside-mount LoPro QT tonneau installs easily to provide a low-profile appearance and to maximize bed usage. Automatic tension controls keep the cover tight while the free-floating hook-and-loop system moves on the rail to reduce wear and tear. The one finger trigger latch releases quickly to open the cover, and the side and corner sealing help keep the elements out while the cover is closed.

TruXedo Inc.
877-878-9336, www.truxedo.com

UNDERCOVER

The low-profile UnderCover LUX adds cargo protection and enhances the look of any truck. Styled ribs, soft corners, contoured edges and a spoiler give this hard tonneau cover a sleek look. The lighted, lockable lift-up cover also features hidden hinges for improved looks. The LUX comes from the factory painted to match the truck.

UnderCover, 866-900-8800
www.undercoverinfo.com



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Rare With Flare

1954 BOLES AERO MIRA MAR

This charming and rare 1954 Boles Aero Mira Mar 19-foot trailer is a true survivor. Purchased by Liz and Barry Marks of Santa Ynez, California, in March 2012, it was in its original state when Barry found it stored in a hangar at the local airport, which had helped to preserve it. The previous owner had bought the trailer from the original owners' estate sale, where it was kept in the family's barn in Ojai, California, which further ensured its preservation.

When the couple took possession, a good polish and clean up was all it needed. They applaud those previous owners who helped keep it in its excel-

lent original condition. Since purchasing it, Liz and Barry have camped in it at vintage trailer rallies and showed it at three venues in California — the Concours d' Elegance in San Luis Obispo, Modernism Week in Palm Springs and the Murphy Auto Museum in Oxnard.

Liz told us, "We find great enjoyment when we show the Boles. There is a special synergy around the vintage trailers that brings forth memories that so many people share in. Our journey to find a vintage travel trailer started four years ago as we always wanted an old trailer to put in the backyard for our grandchildren."



She added: "Soon after we found our first trailer, we took it to a local trailer rally and camped, and we were hooked after that. Now we go camping with our grandchildren. We currently own three vintage trailers and never pass up the opportunity to rescue an old trailer when we can. It's become a



This lovely 1954 Boles is a true survivor, with most parts still original. (Top) Original Preway stove is still working 59 years later!

(Below, from left to right) Jack and Jill original Tweed fabric twin sleepers. Cozy dinette is equipped with period-correct vintage items. Humphrey Gas wall light with Pyrex glass globe still works, too!



hobby to rescue, restore and find them new, good caring owners if we can't keep them."

Liz and Barry Marks also currently own a 1955 Cardinal and a 1955 Terry trailer. They will host a vintage trailer rally at Ocean Mesa Campground (El Capitan) north of Santa Barbara, California, in March 2014.

The Story of Boles Trailers

Boles Aero trailers are not as well known as Airstream, Shasta or other popular brands. Yet Boles trailers were some of the best built and finely finished trailers made, and are highly coveted among vintage trailer aficionados.

Like many postwar RV brands, their story is linked to the wartime aircraft industry and skills learned from it. Back in 1939, Don Boles enrolled in a federal government tool and die maker apprenticeship program designed to help the nation recover from the Great Depression. At Lockheed Aircraft in Burbank, California, Boles was trained in airplane manufacturing. After graduating from his apprentice program, Boles joined the Navy for the rest of World War II.

Don Boles and his wife, Jeanette, began building high-quality aluminum trailers in Burbank, California, right after the war ended, when he discovered the demand for trailers and designed his own lightweight aluminum camping trailer. Their first trailers were built in the couple's one-car garage

using money borrowed from Don's father. The tiny workshop forced them to build trailers that were less than 10 feet long. Don started a partnership called B and R Manufacturing with a friend to manufacture a small trailer model called Roadrunner. The first trailer sold quickly for \$675, providing encouragement.

This led to more orders for larger models that required them to get a bigger manufacturing facility, but business stress and financial problems led to an early partnership breakup. At this turning point Boles changed the name to Boles Manufacturing and named his trailers "Boles Aero."

Business prospered and Don Boles was soon able to devote himself full-time

to his new firm. When Boles' first year in production ended in late 1946, more than 300 trailers were already made.

During the early 1960s Boles introduced a number of innovations that are still employed on modern trailers. These include flush covers for heaters and hot-water tanks, and recessed door handles and water fillers, which gave the trailers a clean, smooth aerodynamic (Aero) look. Over the years, Boles models grew from early 9- and 12-foot trailers up to large 27- to 35-foot units. Later trailers featured chrome and unique gold-anodized panels. By the time Don and Jeanette Boles finally retired and manufacturing was shut down in 1980, more than 18,000 trailers had been built. 🚐



Vintage travel decals adorn the front window.



AMSOIL Synthetic ATF

Longer service life and better protection have long been the selling points of synthetic oil. AMSOIL has introduced its OE Synthetic Automatic Transmission Fluid, available in Multi-Vehicle and Fuel-Efficient formulas. According to AMSOIL, the product guards against thermal breakdown, keeps components clean, and resists heat-related evaporation and viscosity loss. It is also reported to provide better cold-weather performance for fast, reliable shifts and improved fuel economy during cold weather. The product promotes shudder-free starts and smooth clutch engagement, while seal conditioners help prevent seals and gaskets from drying out. Suitable for a wide variety of applications.

MSRP: \$8.50/quart

800-956-5695, www.amsoil.com

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Firestone Air Command

Obtaining the correct rear suspension adjustment just got easier with the introduction of the Air Command Kit for Android from Firestone Industrial Products. The kit is intended to give users the ability to adjust air helper springs wirelessly using their Android smartphone as the remote control. Firestone for Android owners can download the Firestone Ride-Rite Air Command app for Android using the Google Play Store app (no charge). The app works with an Air-Rite Electronic Control Unit and the light-duty air compressor. Firestone also offers the Compact Remote Air Command System, consisting of a key fob controller used to inflate/deflate the rear air springs.

MSRP: \$557

800-247-4337, www.firestoneip.com

Circle 132 on Reader Service Card



aFe Power Cat Back Exhaust for Ford F-150 EcoBoost

aFe Power has introduced its MACH Force XP cat-back exhaust system for the 2011-2013 3.5-liter EcoBoost engine. Constructed of 3-inch mandrel-bent 409 stainless-steel and finished with a wrinkle-black slash-cut tip, the system's larger diameter and free-flowing muffler result in increased exhaust flow, as well as more horsepower and torque, according to the company. The MACH Force XP uses all factory mounting locations for hassle-free installation, and includes OE-style bayonet hangers, band clamps and all necessary hardware. The system fits the 144.5-inch wheelbase only.

MSRP: \$523.95

www.afepower.com

Circle 133 on Reader Service Card



Dual Backup Camera

Hitching up, and backing up while hitched are two of the biggest challenges facing RVers — but AmeriCam Automotive Cameras thinks it has the solution. The AmeriCam KT41BT kit includes two cameras that work interchangeably; one camera is installed at the back of the trailer, the other on the back of the tow vehicle. When the tow vehicle and trailer are hitched, the backup camera on the trailer operates, allowing easier backing into campsites. When the trailer is disconnected, the system automatically switches back to the tow vehicle camera, which can be used for daily driving and hitching up.

MSRP: \$425

800-985 0535, www.americam.co Circle 134 on Reader Service Card



Bully Dog Tuning – Unlocking the Cummins

As you may have heard, aftermarket tuning devices have been unavailable for late-model Cummins turbodiesel engines, which are optional in Ram 2500 and 3500 series pickup trucks. That's because the powertrain control module (PCM) was designed to prevent modifications.

Bully Dog Technologies has announced a breakthrough that allows the company's GT Diesel Tuner to work with its newer Cummins engines. Typically, adding new applications to the GT Diesel just involves a software update, but not in this case. Until now, this engine has been locked down electronically, preventing owners from making any changes. Bully Dog is first to market with this unlock technique, as well as the accompanying performance tuning. The 2013 Cummins tuning provides three on-the-fly tuning options with stock, towing performance and extreme settings.

Bully Dog has introduced a five-step process for modifying Ram pickups with the 2013 Cummins 6.7-liter engine. Customers first purchase a PCM unlock service from Bully Dog, then remove the PCM and ship it to the company using the call tag provided at the time of purchase. Bully Dog unlocks your stock PCM, allowing it to be tuned, then ships it back to you — at which point you can decide how you want to tune it with the #40420 GT Diesel Tuner (sold separately). Details, including pricing and emissions legality, are available at

www.unlocked.bullydog.com.

Bully Dog promises that when it receives a PCM, its engineers will unlock and ship the unit back with a fast turnaround, ensuring drivers are not without their trucks any longer than absolutely necessary. Bully Dog reports that the GT Diesel Tuner can deliver an additional 75 horsepower to a new Cummins, as well as 170 more lb-ft of torque. Additionally, the GT also has several monitoring functions and gauges that can make the driving experience even better.

Bully Dog is also adding more tuning for 2014 Chevrolet Silverados and GMC Sierras with 5.3-liter, 6.0-liter and 6.2-liter gas engines with the GT Gas tuner. California drivers can also get in on the action, because this update also allows the 50 State Legal version of the GT Gas (Number 40410) to support most of the new GMs. These tuners reportedly add up to 19 horsepower to a Chevrolet or GMC truck, and allow multiple drivetrain settings to be tuned and adjusted. They include a fully customizable gauge pack that monitors four gauge functions at one time and a Driving Coach feature to

help form efficient driving habits. If you want to haul your trailer through the back country, change the tuner settings to allow your vehicle the additional power desired for those steep grades. Bully Dog offers products for GM, Ford, Dodge, Ram, Nissan, Jeep and Toyota.

Bully Dog Technologies, 877-285-5936, www.bullydog.com.

GMC News

GMC Trucks has introduced a free phone app for trailering which can be downloaded from the iTunes store. The app provides helpful trailer towing info and can help choose the right GMC model for specific towing requirements. The app also includes safety tips, a checklist, tow ratings and a glossary.

GMC has also introduced the new Sierra 1500 pickup. When equipped with the 4.3-liter EcoTec3 V-6 engine, it is reported to have segment-best standard V-6 torque and a tow rating up to 7,200 pounds. With the V-8 engine it's also claimed to have segment-best V-8 fuel economy. Visit www.gmc.com.

Finding Fuel

Diesel Technology Forum offers a variety of apps and other ways for diesel owners to find fuel. Drivers traveling into new areas should find this very useful. Biodiesel fuel locations and alternative fuels are also included. For more information go to www.dieselforum.org/FindDiesel.

NHTSA Making it Easier for Owners to Search For Recalls

NHTSA is introducing a revised version of its website where vehicle owners can search for recalls by a vehicle identification number (VIN). The database is also to include information on whether a vehicle has been repaired or not. The updated website is slated to go live in 2014 at www.nhtsa.gov.

Once the PCM is unlocked, the 2013 Ram Cummins engine can be tuned with the GT Diesel Tuner.



New From Goodyear

The Wrangler All-Terrain Adventure with Kevlar tire could be the ideal replacement rubber for travel in all conditions



The Goodyear All-Terrain Adventure with Kevlar tire is Goodyear's best all-terrain tire effort yet, with great traction in wet or dry highway conditions, good off-road bite and outstanding durability.

If there's one word that rules the lives of tire engineers, it's "compromise." In a perfect world, we would all fit our vehicles with the ideal tire for the prevailing season, ensuring optimal performance for the conditions at hand. In reality, however, this simply isn't possible or practical for most of us, so when a new tire is developed, it's expected to perform equally well under all conditions. It's got to have good grip, but wear well. It has to have great stability, but also offer a comfortable ride. And, it's got to inspire confidence whether the road is wet or dry.

Now, add truck and SUV owners into the mix, and engineers are presented with a whole new set of challenges. Because, in addition to the above characteristics, tires for these customers must be able to shed mud and snow, provide adequate grip in dirt and sand, and resist punctures caused by rocks, tree stumps and other obstacles. And one other thing: They've got to do all this better than the competition.

It sounds pretty unreasonable, perhaps even impossible — but these were the goals Goodyear set for its engineers during the development of the all-new Goodyear Wrangler All-Terrain Adventure (ATA) with Kevlar tire.

The light truck market is on the rebound, and with it, the demand for replacement tires. According to the Rubber Manufacturer's Association, all-terrain tires accounted for 17 percent of the market, or about 41 million tires in 2012. As of 2011, Goodyear had the lion's share of the light truck tire market at 11.5 percent (impressive considering it has some 27 recognized competitors) — but with the competition steadily encroaching on its territory, the rubber giant realized it would need a new weapon to compete with its worthy

adversaries and maintain its dominant market position. The Goodyear Wrangler ATA is that weapon.

If the name Wrangler already sounds familiar, it should. Wrangler is not just a single tire, but a product line that already includes on-/off-road tires such as the street-biased ArmorTrac

ALL-TERRAIN » The Goodyear ATA features a layer of Kevlar over the steel belts, while the Pro Grade Package heaps on two layers, plus 30 percent more steel than the standard ATA.



PHOTOS COURTESY, GOODYEAR



(Left) In the hills above Colorado Springs, Colorado, we tested the ATA over the types of dirt roads RVers are likely to encounter when getting away from it all. Even at full on-road inflation pressure on a 2WD vehicle, they seemed to have more than enough bite. **(Right)** Perhaps the biggest surprise of our test was the autocross course Goodyear set up for testing. Featuring tight turns and even a few wet corners, we found that the ATA exhibited uncommonly good handling for an all-terrain tire.

PHOTOS BY CHRIS HEEMER

and the off-road leaning DuraTrac. With the introduction of the Wrangler ATA, Goodyear successfully bridged the gap between on-road manners and off-road prowess — and by its own admission, has created the company’s most versatile all-terrain tire yet.

As you might expect, the ATA features all the hallmarks of an on-/off-road tire, including traction ridges and open shoulder blocks for clearing mud and snow, plus biting edges and a tread compound designed for superior traction on wet and icy roads. But Goodyear’s ace in the hole, from both marketing and engineering standpoints, is a layer of DuPont Kevlar, widely recognized as one of the toughest materials created by mankind. In fact, Goodyear maintains it is the only tire company licensed to use the Kevlar name, and it’s emblazoned on the sidewall just to drive the point home. Placed over the steel belts, the Kevlar material adds a significant measure of toughness without adding excessive rigidity. In addition, Goodyear’s Durawall Technology in the sidewall has been designed to help resist cuts and punctures when traveling off-road.

Goodyear even seems to have

thrown a bone to RVers with its so-called Pro Grade Package. Available in LT sizes in Load Range E, the Pro Grade Package offers two layers of Kevlar, plus belts that offer 30 percent more steel. They’re also marked with the coveted Severe Snow Conditions symbol on the sidewall that allows travel on snow or ice.

To get a feel for the new Wrangler ATA tires, we traveled to Colorado Springs, Colorado, to test them in conditions that are common to light truck/SUV owners — namely, paved rural highways and rutted dirt roads — and see how they perform. Goodyear also lined up an autocross course in a vacant parking lot that allowed us to push the tires to their limits in both wet and dry conditions.

Granted, without directly comparing the new Wrangler ATA against its key competitors in all likely conditions, it’s difficult to determine if they perform markedly better than other all-terrain treads, but we will say this: We found absolutely no fault with them. They rode comfortably over rough pavement and seemed to have outstanding grip, especially in wet conditions. Dirt is dirt, but we thought that the tire performed about

as well as could be expected for a double-duty tire at full inflation pressure.

At the autocross course, Goodyear supplied a recent model Chevy 1500 pickup for our testing purposes, with the traction and stability control systems disabled so we could test tire grip without the computer stepping in. We literally had to try to make the tires break traction and when they did, the truck was very easy to bring back under control without a lot of wallowing caused by sidewall flex and tread squirm.

The new Goodyear tire is offered in 44 sizes (24 metric, 20 LT-metric) for 86 percent market coverage. The company obviously wants to make sure you enjoy them for a long time, as they’re the only Wrangler tire covered by a 60,000-mile warranty, or 20 percent longer than other Wrangler tires.

If your travels take you to faraway places and unknown conditions (which pretty much describes the RVing lifestyle), Goodyear’s new Wrangler All-Terrain Adventure with Kevlar tire is about as good as you can get. Price varies by size/application. 🚗

The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company
330-796-2121, www.goodyear.com

(Right) The company maintains it is the only tire manufacturer licensed to use the Kevlar name, and proudly displays it on the sidewall. **(Far right)** The ATA features open tread blocks, biting edges and siping to handle off-road driving, plus a tread compound that feels a lot more pliable than its 60,000-mile warranty would suggest. Durawall technology in the sidewalls is designed to protect against cuts and punctures on roads less traveled.





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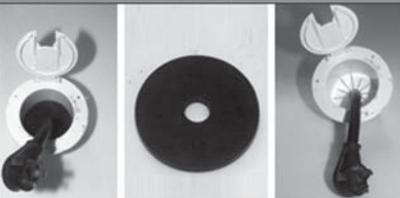
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GENERATOR OUTPUT AND A/C

Q There are portable generators on the market that advertise 120 volts, 3 kW (3,000 watts) and have a 30-ampere electrical outlet. If you do the math (watts divided by volts equals amperes), these portable generators can only provide 2,500 watts of power.

Is this enough to power my 30-ampere RV camping trailer? Am I risking damage to my air conditioner due to "underpower?"

Oscar Wiltse, Flowery Branch, Georgia

A You didn't mention whether or not your trailer is equipped with a 13,500 Btu or 15,000 Btu air conditioner, Oscar. However, portable generators rated at 3kW are capable of running a rooftop air conditioner as long as you don't load the circuit down with a lot of other power-hungry devices at the same time. It also helps to operate the A/C at a lower fan speed setting to conserve a little energy. In general, such a generator is more than enough to operate the electrical appliances in an average RV with a 30-amp circuit.

As for your concern about rated output versus calculated output, start by checking the specs on the generator. Most portable generator manufacturers have such information available on their websites for easy reference (and

many include a list of items that are compatible with the unit's output). For example, the Honda EU3000iS (pictured) is rated for a maximum power output of 3,000 watts for up to 30 minutes, which is pretty generous. The continuous power output rating is 2,800 watts. In reality, most higher-draw 120-volt AC devices such as a microwave, hair dryer, coffee maker and such are short-term draws on the system, and again, provided you don't use too many of these items at the same time, you will be fine. — **Jeff Johnston**



WORN SUSPENSION

Q While on the homeward leg of our summer travels, we stopped for fuel in central Utah and a mechanic at the garage noticed the near-new tires on our travel trailer were wearing unevenly. He quickly diagnosed that the tandem axle suspension components were badly worn, thus allowing the tires to squirm and wear rapidly. Specifically, the equalizer and spring shackle assemblies were completely worn out. I was shocked to learn that the bushings were made of plastic.

My trailer is 5 years old, but this very knowledgeable mechanic said he's seen the same high rate of wear in tandem axle components in as little as two or three years. Fortunately, he had the correct size heavy-duty replacement kit, complete with bronze bushings and grease fittings for each bushing. He also installed new gas shocks.

I've owned tandem axle trailers for nearly 30 years and had not encountered this problem until now. In your experience, is this a common occurrence? I encourage everyone who owns a tandem axle trailer to have these components checked when the wheel bearings are serviced.

Ken Phillips, Glendale, Arizona

A Sage words of advice, Ken. Secure suspension components are vital to your travel safety. Unfortunately, we hear about this kind of wear all too often. Most RV trailers are built with

basic-design, fairly simple suspension systems without zerk fittings for lubrication. The means by which the spring bolts are mounted and pivot in the other components create some wear conditions that must be monitored. You can disassemble these components now and then and pack in and on as much grease as possible but the better solution is the heavy-duty aftermarket shackle kit with improved bushing surfaces and zerk fittings. These kits aren't expensive and can help deter the fast onset of trailer suspension failure. — **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.

CHINESE TIRES

Q In *Trailer Life's* September issue, *RV Clinic* column, there's a letter from George Nachtsheim of Littleton, Colorado, regarding Chinese tires and his attempt to find and buy tires made in America. I have heard that the Good-year Marathon tires are made in China. However, the Goodyear G-rated tire is made in America. I have them on my 2003 Alpenlite fifth-wheel trailer with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 14,000 pounds. They are 14-ply, 16-inch tires and hold 110 PSI of air pressure. This is my second set. They do cost more than the Marathons, but are worth it if they work for your trailer.

I have always had a positive experience with Goodyear and if a problem arose the company has stood behind its product. I have also been using Michelin (also made in America) tires for about 40 years and never had a problem.

Bob Hipskind, Brentwood, California

A Thanks for the tire suggestion, Bob. As a matter of fact, Michelin tires are manufactured in a variety of overseas countries including Germany, Spain, the U.K., France, Canada, Brazil and others. In most cases, it's not so much the country of manufacture as it is the quality specifications implemented by the tire company and the degree to which the company monitors the products being made by its overseas factory. In short, if a tire company wants cheap tires built, that's what the factory builds. If a higher-grade product is called for, the tire factory will build those too. Lower cost from an overseas source is also a factor, of course.

Most ST (special trailer) tires are made overseas these days. Well-known companies like Goodyear, Maxxis and Carlisle are producing decent tires in their overseas plants, but there are a number of others that are producing lower-quality tires that seem to fail more often, especially when not cared for properly or underinflated. The Goodyear G614 RST tires are a good choice for heavier trailers that have 16-inch wheels. If you plan on switching tires make sure the wheels are rated appropriately. — **J.J.**

TRAILER PLUG CORROSION

Q I enjoy all your fixes for the problems that occur on RVs. I've pulled three different pop-up trailers for 30 years and know what can happen. In 2005 we moved up to a 31-foot Rockwood. I am a retired heavy truck mechanic of 37 years and in regard to Curtis Hart of Round Rock, Texas ("Trailer Connector Corrosion," September), on the trailers and semis I worked on all those years, we used dielectric grease on the connectors. Applied liberally to a clean plug, you shouldn't have any problems with corrosion. I live in Michigan and the potential for corrosion problems here is constant.

Nick Rutkowski, Livonia, Michigan

MORE CORROSION

Q I dealt with the corrosion of the seven-pin connector by dipping the trailer end in vinegar until the corrosion was removed. The plug receiver on my truck was sprayed with the same and wiped dry. I sprayed both ends with a product I use on my boat electronics to prevent saltwater corrosion. It's called Corrosion Block by Lear Chemical. I use it on most things that are required to perform in the exterior environment.

Ray Jodoin, North Port, Florida

A Thank you for the suggestions, Nick and Ray. Dielectric grease can be found at most hardware and auto parts stores nationwide and Corrosion Block also sounds very useful. Such products would also be handy on tail-light bulbs, for example, and any other electrical connections where it helps to deter corrosion. — **J.J.**

2014 GM LONG BOX TRUCK?

Q After reading about the new 2014 Silverado half-ton with the good gas mileage and higher tow ratings (*Performance Corner*, September), I went to a Chevy dealer to order one and found out the following: The extended cab is now called a double cab. It has the small rear door that opens normally. It only comes with what they call a standard bed, which is 6.5 feet long.

The salesman told me that they will never be available with an 8-foot bed.

READER SERVICE

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RV CLINIC

He also told me that when the 2500HDs come out in the new body style they will not have an 8-foot bed on the double cab. He told me that if I want an extended cab with an 8-foot bed I will have to buy a leftover 2013 while they are still available.

Could you please find out and let me know if it is true that Chevy will never have the new double cab with an 8-foot bed, or was the salesman just trying to push a 2013 leftover on me?

I currently tow a fifth-wheel with a 2004 Silverado 2500HD with the 8.1-liter engine and Allison transmission. It is a real gas-guzzler. I was looking to trade it on the new 1500s but I need an 8-foot bed. If they are going to come out with the 8-foot bed double-cab in the future I will wait for it.

Ron Fillmore, Via email

A Your salesman is right, Ron; the Crew Cab and Double Cab versions of the new 2014 1500 truck are not available with the full 8-foot bed. You need to buy the standard cab truck to get the long bed. It seems odd that a company like GM would lose sight of the fact that there's a big world of real-life truck users out there who need — not just want — a traditional full-size truck bed on something besides a standard-cab truck, but such company planners sometimes work in mysterious ways. They also have good reasons, such as customer demand or the lack of same, for planning their new models.

"Never" is a long time, though, so it's possible the 8-foot bed could return to the 1500 models in the future. While an 8-foot bed is available on standard and Crew Cab HD models, you'll need to choose a 2013 model, as the salesman suggested, if you need the 1500 long bed with an extended cab now.

— J.J.

BAD TV ANTENNA

Q We have a 30-foot Holiday Rambler fifth-wheel and cannot get TV reception at campgrounds, but my brother parked next to us in a newer camper can get reception. So I was wondering if a TV antenna can go bad.

Dorothy Harvey, Via email

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A Any piece of RV equipment can go bad, Dorothy. The antenna includes several electrical connections between the antenna and your TV including the antenna booster that's between the two components. You'll need to have each of those connections inspected for corrosion or some other fault that may prevent the signal from coming through. You didn't say how old your trailer or TV are so it's also possible that your TV is old enough it's not fully compatible with the digital TV signals available over the air. Inquire with your local RV service center that's familiar with current electronics and you should find your answer. — J.J.

SLANTED HITCH

Q I pull a 2010 Keystone trailer. When the dealer installed the hitch on my 2001 Chevy 2500 HD truck, they installed it at a slant. I thought it should have been level, not aimed downward. Which is correct?

Garry, Via email

A I'm guessing you mean the adjustable head on your weight-distributing (WD) hitch is set so it "aims downward" toward the trailer instead of being perpendicular to the ground. That's one of the standard adjustability features on most WD hitches. It allows the installer to achieve the best possible hookup with the WD spring bars. Tilted too far up, the support chains at the bar ends may be too short to allow free movement. Too far down, and the bar ends may hang low enough to be a potential ground clearance problem that can catch on some roadway hazards. So yes, some tilt of the hitch head is normal. — J.J.

DIFFICULT DURAMAX

Q We have a 2005 Chevrolet Duramax 2500HD with 101,000 miles on the odometer. We use this to tow a 2010 Open Range fifth-wheel with a loaded weight of about 13,000 pounds. The truck usually does a great job of towing this trailer except for an occasional situation where the truck misses and jerks for several seconds. This happens when in Tow/Haul mode under light ac-

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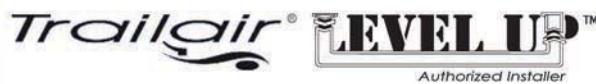
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celeration at approximately 1,600 RPM.

I've taken it to the local Chevrolet dealer several times and they were unable to duplicate the condition without the trailer attached. I recently brought the truck to the dealer with the trailer attached. A diesel technician rode with me on a test drive and attached their analyzer to the truck before we left. I was able to make the truck miss on that test drive. The technician also drove the truck in Tow/Haul mode without the trailer and was able to get it to miss, once he was aware of the appropriate conditions.

The dealer's analyzer was unable to detect any irregular conditions during either test drive so they contacted General Motors. The manufacturer said it was a faulty fuel pressure regulator so the dealer tested the one on our vehicle. They found it to be working correctly. They were reluctant to install a new regulator for \$1,100 because they did not believe it would address the problem. The dealer also tested the computer software and found everything to be within specifications. They also road tested another early generation Duramax (2002) that was in their shop and stated that it did the same thing. They noticed some throttle pulsing when this happened.

They gave the vehicle back to me without making any repairs and said that if this happens, take my foot off the throttle and then reapply it. The problem will disappear. I'm not comfortable with this and would like to know if you've encountered this problem and are aware of an actual fix.

Victor Scotti, Rancho Cordova, California

A This one is difficult, Victor. Although I don't have a ready answer, I can offer some potential areas to consider. The early Duramax models did have problems with injectors, and this problem definitely seems to be fuel related. Has this condition been present for some time, or has it started to exhibit only recently? A recent appearance of the problem could indicate a mechanical failure of a component such as an injector.

The 2005 model year is the LLY engine configuration, which is the first

appearance of the Variable Geometry Turbo. Since there are moving vanes in the turbine portion of the turbo, there is the possibility that carbon buildup or other mechanical interference is preventing the vanes from moving properly. However, I would expect this sort of problem to affect a greater operating range.

Since this seems to occur only during Tow/Haul operation, it is possible that the condition is caused by some aspect of the Allison transmission's control. The lockup of the torque converter clutch (TCC) is affected by Tow/Haul mode, and it is possible that the surging sensation is a byproduct of TCC lockup. This would likely result in a rather harsh surge or bucking of the vehicle.

Since this problem seems to have a very specific set of conditions that cause it to occur, the fuel management is likely operating in the same portion of the fuel tables during the operating modes you're having problems with. This leads toward the conclusion that it's a software glitch in the computer rather than a hardware problem. It is possible that the calibration is not well sorted out for these specific conditions. If the problem has been present for a long time (especially if it has been there since new), I would be more inclined to suspect this as a cause. I recommend having the computer re-flashed with the latest updates to start.

— Ken Freund

TRAILER-AXLE RATINGS

Q We just purchased a 2013 Bay Hill 320RS built by Evergreen. The unloaded trailer weight from the manufacturer is 11,303 pounds; the trailer is rated at 14,600 pounds max weight. The axle ratings are 6,000 pounds per axle for a total of 12,000 pounds. On our first trip with it, we decided to weigh the rig. We stopped in a truck stop in Flagstaff, Arizona. The total gross weight of the truck (2007 Dodge Ram 2500 Mega cab 4WD) and trailer was 21,020 pounds. I dropped the trailer and weighed just the truck and the gross weight of the truck only was 7,880 pounds. This would make the trailer weight at 13,140

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

Don Frank, Phoenix, Arizona

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

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

FUEL IN OIL

Q I have a 2012 F-150 with 3.5-liter EcoBoost engine. Since the truck was new it has been dumping fuel into the crankcase oil. The Ford dealership has performed three so-called fixes on the truck with no improvement. The first attempt was to replace the intercooler. This fixed a major stall problem on acceleration, but did not correct the fuel-into-the-crankcase issue. The second attempt at fixing the problem was to replace all the fuel injectors. Again this did not fix the ongoing fuel in the engine oil problem. The third attempt at fixing the problem was to replace the fuel pump in the gas tank. Again this did not correct the problem. The truck has approximately 10,000 miles on at this time and the dealership has assured me that running the engine with gasoline in the oil will not compromise the engine. I may be just

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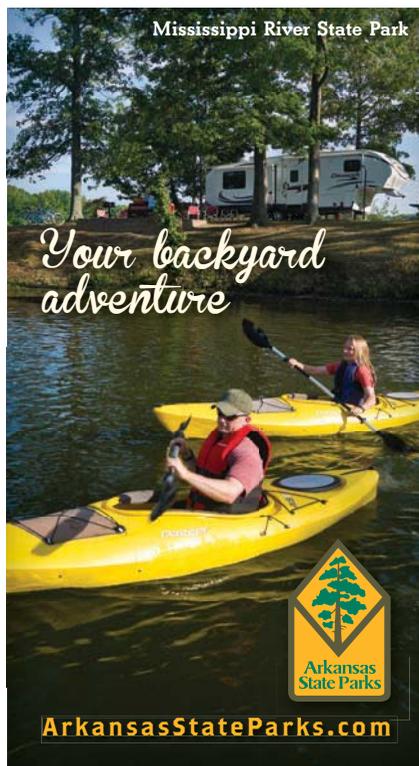
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an old farm boy, but I do know a little about engines. Any technical help with this ongoing problem would be greatly appreciated.

Lloyd T. Flynt, Bremond, Texas

A Sometimes it amazes me the lack of basic mechanical system understanding that some professional technicians display, and the resulting "shotgun" parts replacement approaches. Fuel can't get into the oil because of a faulty intercooler, nor due to the electric fuel pump. Leaky injectors could cause it, but they can be tested for leakage without replacing them. Three strikes and they're out. Fuel in the oil of these engines is a fairly common concern. It is very likely that the diaphragm in the fuel pressure regulator is porous, allowing pressurized fuel to get drawn into the engine via the vacuum line that goes to it when the engine is off boost. It's important to get this fixed as soon as possible to prevent bearing damage, etc., and should be clearly recorded in the service records in case the engine fails prematurely. — **K.F.**

LOW TRAILER WANTED

Q We are looking for a fifth-wheel trailer that is much lower than ones you test and are in advertisements in your magazine. We presently have a Holiday Rambler 29-foot fifth-wheel and it is too hard for my wife to climb into and out of. We are looking for a trailer similar to the horse trailers that have living quarters that are low to the ground. Are you aware of any manufacturer that builds fifth-wheel trailers of that type in the 30- to 40-foot range, no slideouts required? It would be nice to have a garage for a golf cart but it's not a necessity. Any assistance in locating this type of unit would be greatly appreciated. I am sure others in our position would like to know if this type unit is available and maybe would not be forced to stop RVing.

Austin Karl, Horman, Maryland

A Fifth-wheel trailers are built higher than travel trailers because they have to reach over the tops of the truck



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beds and some are quite tall these days. Therefore I suggest you consider switching to a toy-hauler type of travel trailer that has a space in the rear for a golf cart.

There are several companies that build RVs specifically designed for people with limited mobility. A Google search should turn up some of those companies. You'll likely pay somewhat more for that kind of custom-built rig but it will also suit your needs more closely. — K.F.

DIESEL FUEL ADDITIVES

QA diesel mechanic recommended I use the diesel fuel additive Opti-Lube. I drive a 2010 Ford F-250 with a 6.4-liter Power Stroke diesel engine and use the Ford fuel additive Cetane Booster. Is this enough, or should I use both Opti-Lube and Cetane Booster, just Opti-Lube or none of the above? Do you know if using Opti-Lube would void Ford's warranty?

Oscar Jackson, Via email

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A Many shops (and Ford) use the sale of additives (which typically have high markups) as a way to boost their bottom line, with very little work involved. Ford cetane improver claims to boost the cetane rating of diesel fuel for improved starting performance, and by doing so increases power, smoothes engine operation, improves fuel economy and adds lubricity to fuel. Cetane is a measure of how easy it is to ignite diesel fuel (sort of the reverse of gasoline octane). Low quality diesel fuel, which is typically found in Third-World countries, may need cetane booster. But most quality fuels sold by major companies in the USA for on-highway use should not need additives.

In order to void a warranty, the burden of proof is on Ford to prove that an additive caused the damage in question. Opti-Lube is a fairly well-known line of additives, and it is very unlikely that its use could lead to a refusal of warranty coverage. — K.F.

SULFUR ODOR

Q I think I can help on the "sulfur odor" question from Joann Fisher in the December 2012 issue. After almost 40 years in the water business, I may have seen it all. A sulfur or rotting egg smell from only the bathroom sink (usually in warm weather and only the first use) is from gasses in the P-trap. This is caused by a build-up of bacteria in the P-trap that ferments overnight in warm weather, and the first flush of water forces the foul smelling gases right into your face. This is most prevalent in sinks with vented P-traps. The solution is to snake out the trap (and the sink overflow) and clean it with a safe drain cleaner.

Steven E. Mains, Riverside, California

A Thanks so much for writing and sharing your expertise with Joann and other readers. — K.F. ☺

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Sue McGartland, Livingston, Texas



My Cup of Tea... or Coffee...or Wine

Drinking a beverage while reading the newspaper or watching TV was a problem in our RV. There was no place to set a cup or glass when seated at one end of the sofa. We have an assortment of old RV accessories purchased through the years that are no longer needed. One of these items was an oak cutting board in new condition. I simply cut both ends off the cutting board, attached them using counter-sunk wood screws from below and mounted the shelf to the wall. There you have it, a perfect place for a wine glass — or a cup of coffee or tea.

Danny and Cathy Lindstrom, Salinas, California

QUICK FIX

No Back Pain

Seeing the full-page advertisement of the Husky Center Line Hitch in your September issue prompted me to write. The first year I had this hitch I stored it in my trailer that I kept at a remote storage lot. This meant that the task of carrying the hitch from the trailer to the SUV was part of the hookup procedure. It's a heavy-duty hitch, with emphasis on the word "heavy." My back has suffered since there is no way I can place the hitch into the receiver and keep my back straight as is recommended for heavy lifting. This year I stored the hitch on a dolly in my garage at home. I fitted the dolly with a plywood box to support the hitch. The box is at the proper height to slide the hitch right into the receiver without any lifting. I can insert the hitch the day before an outing, thus reducing hookup time at the trailer storage lot.

Using a little brain power has saved my back in a big way. —**James Ward, Worthington, Ohio** 📧

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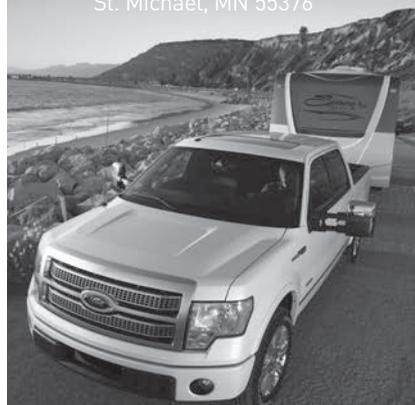
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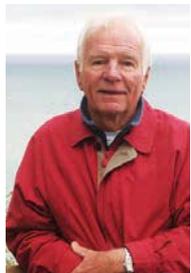
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Prairies and Planes

Historic trails cross the Cornhusker State, and a museum rich in heritage documents air and space accomplishments



Covered wagons — primarily used to transport goods, though people rode in them as well — were also called prairie schooners. Driving across these prairies of Nebraska I can see why. Visually, prairies have the same broad beauty of the ocean, maybe as seen from the deck of a two-masted schooner. Their immensity runs until it hits the horizon, marked only by shadows that drift with the clouds.

Nebraska was all roll-over country in the years of the great migration, when the westbound pioneers crossed here in the mid-1800s. Their wagons left ruts that are still here along the Platte River. The road had many names: The Oregon Trail, the Mormon Trail and, later, the “Forty-Niner” Trail for those headed to the gold fields of California.

Gradually, settlers discovered rich soil beneath the waving, coarse grasses, irrigated the land, and built farms and ranches. Willa Cather brought the country’s attention to Nebraska with her novels about frontier life on the Great Plains. Her words are in stone at the state capital in Lincoln: “There seemed to be nothing to see; no fences, no creeks or trees, no hills or fields. If there was a road, I could not make it out in the faint starlight. There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material of which countries are made.”

And so it was: Tracing the route of the pioneers across Nebraska, a major step was the First Transcontinental Railroad. Next was America’s first cross-country highway, the Lincoln Highway, which spans 462 miles of Nebraska prairie. It was two lanes of gravel, but it stretched coast to coast from Times Square in New York to Lincoln Park in San Francisco. Formally dedicated on October 31, 1913, this year marks its 100th anniversary.

Not far from the banks of the Platte River and the Oregon Trail is Interstate 80. I crossed it at exit 420, and the westbound lane to Lincoln was bumper to bumper. It was football Saturday and nothing excites Nebraskans like a Cornhuskers home football game. On this day, Memorial Stadium in Lincoln will be the third largest city in the state.

I spent the morning at the Lee G. Simmons Conser-



(Top) The U-2 spy plane at the Strategic Air & Space Museum. **(Above)** Many animals, including this bull elk, live a comfortable life at the Simmons Conservation Park.

vation Park and Wildlife Safari, a drive-through wildlife park. The road through it is 4 miles long and the habitats are enclosed by fences. Obviously, they don’t want their animals wandering with animals that are part of their food chain, and vice versa. Areas are named for their occupants: Elk Prairie, Deer Woods, Pelican Wetlands, Crane Meadows, Wolf Canyon — black bears are there, too — and Bison Plains. The American bison — they have 40 — is the heaviest land animal in North America.

After crossing I-80, I visited the Strategic Air & Space Museum in Ashland. There are more than 30 aircraft displayed, including the B-52B Stratofortress of the Strategic Air Command. It was the high-profile bomber of the Cold War that came on line in 1955. Its use toward the end of the Vietnam War (1972) was credited with bringing the North Vietnamese government back to the table for peace talks.

Suspended from the ceiling is the super-secret Lockheed U-2, the single-engine spy plane of the Cold War vintage. It does its work from as high as 70,000 feet, out of range of surface-to-air missiles, and is still in use today.

When I was at Atsugi Naval Air Station in Japan in 1958, we would watch a U-2 land everyday at sundown. A truck would meet it on the runway with guys who put dollies under each of its sailplane-like wings, so they would not drag when they moved it to a secured hangar at a remote corner of the field. It left every morning, very early, in the dark. We never did see it leave.

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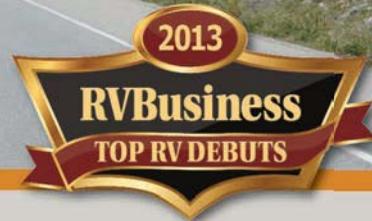
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