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APRIL 2014

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10 Upscale Toy Haulers



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RVLock's deadbolt is activated using a private code, wireless key fob or hard key. Page 68

On the cover: New Horizons RV 43-foot Majestic with triple slides and a 10-foot garage is designed to spoil outdoor enthusiasts.



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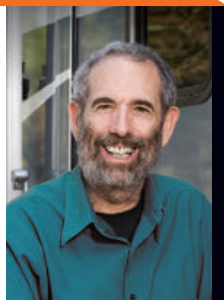
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Haulin' Toys

The latest crop of trailers and fifth-wheels with attached garages are more luxurious — and practical — than ever



At one time, toy hauler trailers were all the rage, especially on the western side of the country. Trailers with garages that could accommodate off-road toys resonated loudly with the younger crowd and the industry was thrilled to see the next generation of RV enthusiasts get hooked on the lifestyle. Things cooled off when economic priorities shifted, sending toy hauler sales into a downward spiral. Now toy haulers are back with a vengeance and companies are building new products that take these specialized RVs to new levels.

A prime example of this resurgence in popularity is the number of new toy haulers that are hitting the market, and the design and feature improvements that are making these rugged trailers more versatile. Toy haulers got their reputation for toughness by appealing to hard-core "toy" owners, who helped turn desert landscapes into temporary off-road communities with, of course, a certain party-time flavor. While many of these are a little more comfortable, the macho image has not been totally abandoned.

There is, though, a population of motorized hobbyists who want the garage but also like creature comforts and interiors with luxurious features. I'm not surprised; age and experience have a tendency to soften the soul, and even hard-core riders are not shy about acquiescing to a more comfortable interior environment, sinking into fine furniture and preparing fancy meals in a gourmet-type kitchen. And it's not hard to be spoiled by a spacious shower and pillow-top mattress after a hard day of riding. It's OK to hide the macho riding gear in the outside compartments.

Testament to this shift in attitude among seasoned fans is the lineup of fancy toy haulers presented on page 40. As you can see, these top-line fifth-wheels leave nothing to chance. Materials used to produce spacious interiors that exude pure luxury and high-end amenities make hanging out in a primitive location or RV resort equally as relaxing — and practical.

Not everyone buys a toy hauler to store motorized equipment. RVs with garages are perfect for dog show enthusiasts, hobby rooms, music rooms, workshops or just about anything that functions best when isolated from the main living quarters. Once the interior connecting door is closed, most onlookers will be hard pressed to recognize the rig as a toy hauler.

No matter what your passion, RVs with garages make it possible to enjoy the outdoors in style, without leaving the toys at home. 🚐

— Bob Livingston, publisher

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HISTORY OF APRIL

It is thought that the name April comes from the Latin word "to open" and describes the trees opening at springtime.

TRAILER LIFE

FOLLOW THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

Publisher Bob Livingston
Editorial Director Eileen Hubbard
Managing Editor Donya Carlson
Technical Editor Chris Hemer
Senior Art Director Rick Damien
Production Director Bob Dawson
Production Manager Brenda Hutchinson
Sales Administrator Katey Purgatorio

Consulting Editors Wes Caughlan, Ken Freund, Jeff Johnston
Contributors Bob Ashley, Kristopher Bunker, Bill Graves, Dave G. Houser, James Richardson, Pamela Selbert, Irene Middleman Thomas, Gary Wescott

Vice President National Sales Terry Thompson
Tel 206-283-9545 Fax 206-283-9571

RV Marketplace/Classifieds Kathy Schurman
516 Maple Knoll Way NW, St. Michael, MN 55376
Tel 763-497-2458 Fax 270-438-4757
kathy.schurman@goodsam.com

Sue Seidlitz (Southwest Region)
10556 Combie Road #6443, Auburn, CA 95602
Tel 530-268-3005 Fax 530-653-2090
sue.seidlitz@goodsam.com

Tacy Hendershot-Sargent (Southeast Region)
1010 SW Lighthouse Drive, Palm City, FL 34990
Tel 772-288-0387 Fax 772-288-0085
thendershot@goodsamfamily.com

Lou Cicirelli (Northeast Region)
1400 NW 108th Avenue, #266, Plantation, FL 33322
Tel 954-297-9234
lcicirelli@goodsamfamily.com

Scott Oakes (Northwest Region)
1818 Westlake Avenue, N. #420
Seattle, WA 98109
Tel 206-283-9545 Fax 206-283-9571
scott.oakes@goodsam.com

Crompton Holdings Scott Crompton (Detroit, MI)
2031 Kings Highway, Shreveport, LA 71103
Tel 334-546-7243 Fax 334-356-7740
scottcrompton@mac.com

Chairman Emeritus Art Rouse
Publisher Emeritus Bill Estes

GS MEDIA & EVENTS

President Mark Boggess
Senior Vice President/Group Publisher Bob Livingston
Vice President/Advertising Sales Terry Thompson

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Long-Time Readers

I have been enjoying *Trailer Life* for a long time (as you can check by your records!). I've had the same trailer for more than 20 years and, before that, had three other towables. *Trailer Life* should do more articles on smaller trailers because some of these big fifth-wheels cost more than a young couple can pay.

Jeff Johnston and Ken Freund's *RV Clinic* column is a must-read, as is *10-Minute Tech*.

G. Harper, Bakersfield, California

Keep up the good work! *Trailer Life* is very informative and helpful, in every article ranging from nuts and bolts to technical.

T. Sanders, Denver, Colorado

Map It

Love all the stories in *Trailer Life* on where to visit. I would like to see a small outline of the state with a dot showing the location of where the article covers. If you're not familiar with the area, you have to get a map out, so this sure would be a big help.

Errol Schafer, Marshfield, Missouri

Speak Up!

Please put more letters in your *Letters* column. I think it's interesting what my fellow RVers have to say!

Roland Owens, Esparto, California

Keep it Simple

Not everyone tows with a brand-new truck (mine is 30 years old) or needs a high-priced toy hauler. I'd like to see more articles on repair and tech, where to go and accessories on simple items that the average person can afford.

E. Haley, Pe Ell, Washington

Extra Fuel

Regarding "Half-Ton Fun" in your *Letters* column in the November 2013 issue, I wanted to let Charles and Alice White know that they should contact Transfer Flow for an after-

History of Palouse Falls

In the December 2013 issue, there was an article on Walla Walla, Washington, and author Carl Calvert talked about Palouse Falls. I thought that you might like a little history of the falls (discovered in 1841). Palouse Falls State Park was created by the Legislature in 1945 and dedicated on June 3, 1951. My grandmother (Agnes Sells) owned the land on the side that the railroad is on. It was her homestead and she donated almost 10 acres to the state to make it a state park. The land is still owned by one of my cousins.

The water makes a 90-degree turn about 15 feet before it goes over. We'd swim at the bottom, but never went close to the bottom of the falls. The tower of rocks at the top of the falls is what we (as children) called "the castle" and we used to play around it.

There was a clevis downstream from the falls that we used to climb down to get to the bottom of the falls, and that was the only way we got back on top. The land on the other side was also donated to the state (I don't know how much was given).

I left there in 1949 and try to make it back every two years.

Ejnar Middendorf, Mulvane, Kansas



PHOTOS BY ANN CALVERT

market fuel-tank system. My Ford F-350's 98-gallon diesel fuel tank works wonders. The carrying capacity is now a total of 139 gallons, after the addition of the Transfer Flow.

Bob Prue, Plainville, Massachusetts

We solved the problem of having to stop more frequently for fuel (Charles and Alice White's letter) by having a 60-gallon tank installed in the bed of the truck that drained into the front tank on our $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton Ford with the 460-cid engine. They sealed off the fill pipe on the front tank and put a fill pipe in the side of the shell so I can fill it from the outside. I can drive about 500 miles before the gas gauge comes off the "full" mark.

The 460 pulls like a locomotive. I set the cruise at 60 mph and pull a 30-foot Sunnybrook.

Gordon Straka, Rialto, California

Sleep Tight

There are only a handful of RV makers that offer twin beds. I don't think the whole world sleeps two in a bed. Some of us want separate beds for various reasons. I can name only Airstream and Lance that offer a twin option. Also Roadtrek and Pleasureway Class Bs. Am I the only over-70-year-old retired man who travels with his also retired and single brother? We haven't shared a bed in almost 70 years and are not about to do it now.

Ernest Giono, Rohnert Park, California



It's All Good

Bob Livingston's test of the Reflection fifth-wheel in your February issue was so amazing that we are now happy owners of a Reflection 303RLS. We already had the Ford F-350 truck you used for the test, so we are ready to go. The Reflection is everything he said it was and more. Thanks for many years of informed reading.

Patrick and Betsy Cody, Clovis, California

On the Lighter Side

Although it is great fun to see all the fantastic fifth-wheels and campers with all the luxuries, there are a lot of us who love the small camping life. I have been a full-timer in a lovely 29-foot double-slide fifth-wheel for years, but now am at a stage in life where I'm looking for a small trailer to pull with my small SUV. Those r-pods, teardrops and Aliners look like something I would love.

S. Kosidowski, Wabasha, Minnesota

We've addressed these smaller trailers in recent issues: See Bob Ashley's Unique Trailers in the January issue and Kristopher Bunker's Pop-Up Roundup in the March issue. Ed.

Tickled!

Thank you so much for reprinting my mom's article from 1955 about the rhubarb pie (February issue). My mom would have been tickled to see this happen! I am glad *Trailer Life* magazine is still so successful.

Lenore Will, Yucaipa, California

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Settlers heading West on the Oregon, California and Mormon trails used the monument as a significant landmark.



Scotts Bluff National Monument

The prominent rock formation in Nebraska is a landmark that has served people for hundreds of years

article and photo by James Richardson

It towers 800 feet above the North Platte River and 4,659 feet above sea level. It has served as a landmark for people from early Native Americans to settlers heading west on the Oregon, California and Mormon trails, and even Pony Express riders. Now it is a landmark to modern travelers.

The 3,000-acre Scotts Bluff National Monument in northwest Nebraska is rich in geological and paleontological history, as well as human history. Its interpretive center tells the story of westward expansion and protects this significant geological formation.

Just outside the town of Scottsbluff and its twin city Gering along U.S. Route 26 is the impressive geologic land feature. Incidentally, the town "Scottsbluff" is written on maps as one word — a typo when the town was chartered. It was intended to be two words — Scotts Bluff.

Established in 1919, this National Park Service site became a location for the 1930s-era Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Nearly every structure at the Scotts Bluff National Monument was built by the CCC — the Summit Road and its three tunnels, Saddle Rock Trail and the visitor center. The Summit Road, which winds its way to the top, is thought to be the oldest existing concrete road in Nebraska. Vehicle width and length restrictions are in effect for the Summit Road. Those longer than 25 feet and/or higher than 11 feet 7 inches are prohibited. All trailers are prohibited. That necessitates leaving the RV parked at the visitor center and taking the Summit Shuttle, or hiking.

Hiking the 1.6-mile Saddle Rock Trail to the summit might prove to be a strenuous workout, even for the strong hearted. From the visitor center to the summit there is an

elevation change of 435 feet. Well, there is always the free shuttle.

At the summit, hike the half-mile North Overlook Trail to see the badlands area, the city of Scottsbluff and the North Platte River Valley, or the ⅓-mile South Overlook Trail to view the Oregon Trail and Mitchell Pass.

Down below, travelers can view the covered wagons and walk the Oregon Trail Pathway to see remnants of the trails. In the summer months, visitors can experience the living-history program offered.

The only downside to the Scotts Bluff National Monument is that there are no campgrounds or food services within the park. But there are campgrounds in nearby Scottsbluff.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Scotts Bluff National Monument
308-436-9700
www.nps.gov/scbl

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308-632-6342, www.scottsbluff.org/departments/parks_and_recreation

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PHOTOS BY U-JIN LEE



Coachella Festival RV Parking

Planning on attending the annual Coachella Music and Arts Festival in Southern California this April 11 to 13? Event parking provides RVers with their own reserved space where they have in/out privileges and access to air-conditioned shuttle service to and from the festival. In the past, attendees typically parked in stacked parking lots and could not move their vehicles during the event. Facilities provided by Coachella Events allow RVers to come and go as they please.

Rates are \$450 for RVs and \$250 for autos for the three-day event. There will also be a hospitality tent, restrooms, cold bottled water and a relaxation area.

www.coachellaeventparking.com

Pro Bass Fishing Tournament

Get your fishing rods out for the Pro Bass Fishing Tournament at Lake Champlain. Six pro tournaments will be hosted by the city of Plattsburgh, New York, getting underway June 14 with the Bassmaster Weekend Series. Lake Champlain, with almost 600 miles of shoreline, was named one of the top 100 best bass fishing lakes in the United States. The event is open to the public, and one of the most popular events is the Bassmaster Open Tournament July 31 to August 2. The lake has more than 80 species of fish including bass, walleye, lake trout, brown trout, land-locked Atlantic salmon, perch, carp, steelhead and bowfin. www.goadirondack.com/bass.

RV campgrounds in the area include Cumberland Bay State Park (opens for season in May), located on Lake Champlain. 518-563-5240, <http://goadirondack.com/things-to-do-in-the-adirondacks/cumberlandbay>

For a list of campgrounds on the Adirondack Coast, see www.goadirondack.com/camping



PHOTO COURTESY ADIRONDACK COAST VISITORS BUREAU

NEWSWIRE

BUSINESS



Holiday Rambler, R-Vision and Trail-Lite Towables Shuttered

In February, Allied Specialty Vehicles Inc. (ASV) announced the closing of its Holiday Rambler, R-Vision and Trail-Lite towables operations. The company is exiting the towable market in order to "concentrate on its growing, profitable motorized RV product lines," which include the American Coach, Fleetwood RV, Holiday Rambler and Monaco brands. The towable division was not sold, but simply closed, confirmed Steve Hileman, director of marketing for Allied Recreation Group (ARG), speaking on behalf of parent ASV. "It is not a sale. ASV will continue to honor its warranty obligations on towable RV products sold to customers and dealers," said Hileman.

PET SAFETY



New Pet First Aid App From Red Cross

The American Red Cross has issued a new Pet First Aid App. According to a press release, the app puts lifesaving information in the hands of dog and cat owners so they can provide emergency care until veterinary assistance is available. The Pet First Aid App costs 99 cents and provides smartphone users instant access to expert information about pet health and what to do during emergencies. Other features include an animal hospital locator, the ability to set up multiple pet profiles and an early warning sign checker for preventive care. The Pet First Aid App is available at the Apple App Store and Google Play Store or by going to www.redcross.org/mobileapps.

RV INTERIORS



Lippert Components Partners with Ashley Furniture

Lippert Components Inc. (LCI) is partnering with Ashley Furniture Industries to provide its customers with top-quality designer furniture for RVs. LCI will offer a full line of Ashley sofas, sectionals, theater seating and recliners to the RV industry. "Ashley Furniture is one of the largest furniture manufacturers in the country. By offering this line to our customers, we are giving them a widely recognized consumer brand that will add value to every RV they manufacture," said Vice President of Lippert Interiors, Ryan Smith in a press release. The relationship between LCI and Ashley allows LCI to provide customers with extensive furniture options.

Top-Rated RV Parks

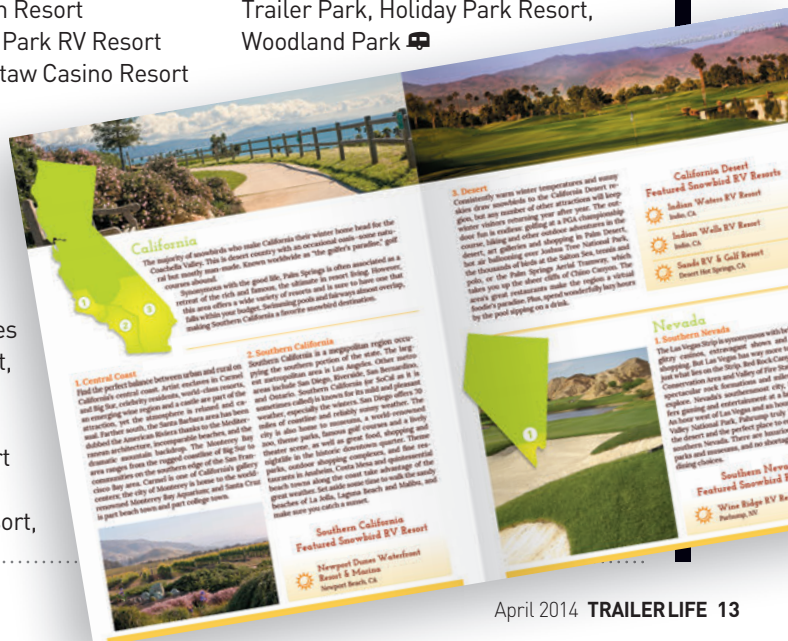
The *Good Sam RV Travel Guide & Campground Directory* has compiled its list of top-rated RV parks to visit in 2014. These parks have been awarded perfect 10/10*/10 ratings for overall best-possible guest experience. The 10/10*/10 Good Sam Rating system that assesses Amenities/Restrooms* (asterisk signifies highest possible cleanliness/Visual Appearance) is achieved by owners and staff of RV parks who are dedicated to providing exceptional quality. The 2014 *Good Sam RV Travel Guide & Campground Directory* features detailed listings of 13,500 RV parks and campgrounds, including more than 2,100 Good Sam parks where members save 10 percent every night. Listed are the elite RV parks that have gone the extra mile to develop clean, attractive facilities.



Alabama — Bella Terra of Gulf Shores, Lake Osprey RV Resorts, Heritage Motorcoach Resort & Marina, Windemere Cove RV Resort
Arizona — Desert Shadows RV Resort, Desert's Edge RV — The Purple Park, Distant Drums RV Resort, Far Horizons Tucson Village RV Resort, Lazydays RV Campground, Mesa Spirit RV Resort, Palm Creek Golf & RV Resort, Pueblo El Mirage Golf & RV Resort, Rincon Country East RV Resort, Rincon Country West RV Resort
Arkansas — Catherine's Landing at Hot Springs, Ozarks RV Resort on Table Rock Lake
California — Jackson Rancheria RV Park, Motorcoach Country Club, Outdoor Resort Indio, Outdoor Resort Palm Springs, Redding Premier RV Resort, The Lakes RV & Golf Resort, The Springs At Borrego RV Resort & Golf Course
Colorado — Mesa Verde RV Resort, Tiger Run RV Resort
Connecticut — Aces High RV Park
Florida — Crystal Lake RV Resort, Emerald Coast RV Beach Resort, Gulf Waters RV Resort, Outdoor Resorts/Chokoloskee Island, River Bend Motorcoach Resort, Signature Motorcoach Resort at Naples, The Great Outdoors RV, Treasure Coast RV Resort, Vacation Inn Resort of the Palm Beaches, Williston Crossings RV Resort
Louisiana — Cajun Palms RV Resort, Paragon Casino RV Resort
Maryland — Castaways RV Resort & Campground
Massachusetts — Beach Rose RV Park, Cape Cod Campresort & Cabins,

Normandy Farms Family Camping Resort, Pine Acres Family Camping Resort
Michigan — Harbortown RV Resort, Hearthside Grove Motorcoach Resort, Little River Casino RV Park, Signature Motorcoach Resort at Bay Harbor, Silver Creek RV Resort, Soaring Eagle Hideaway RV Park, South Haven Sunny Brook RV Resort, Traverse Bay RV Resort, Vacation Station RV Resort
Minnesota — Grand Casino Hinckley, Prairie View RV Park & Campground
Montana — Polson Motorcoach & RV Resort
Nevada — Lakeside Casino & RV Resort, Las Vegas RV Resort, LVM Resort, Nevada Treasure RV Resort
New Jersey — Seashore Campsites
New York — Chautauqua Lake KOA, Lake George RV Park, Skyway Camping Resort, The Villages at Turning Stone
North Carolina — Mountain Falls Luxury Motorcoach Resort
Ohio — Evergreen Park RV Resort
Oklahoma — Choctaw Casino Resort KOA
Oregon — Bend/Sisters Garden RV Resort, Casey's Riverside RV Park, Olde Stone Village RV Park, Pacific Shores Motorcoach Resort, Pheasant Ridge RV Resort, Seven Feathers RV Resort
Pennsylvania — Lake-in-Wood Resort,

Shenango Valley RV Park
South Carolina — Cypress Camping Resort, Hilton Head Harbor RV Resort & Marina, Hilton Head Island Motorcoach Resort/Outdoor Resorts, Ocean Lakes Family Campground, Willowtree RV Resort & Campground
South Dakota — Hart Ranch Camping Resort Club
Tennessee — Smoky Bear Campground, Twin Creek RV Resort
Texas — Advanced RV Resort, Bentsen Palm Village RV Resort, Buckhorn Lake Resort, Fernbrook Park, Forest Retreat RV Park, K.E. Bushman's Camp, Mill Creek Ranch Resort, Northshore RV Resort, Oak Creek RV Park, Rayford Crossing RV Resort, San Jacinto Riverfront RV Park, Shallow Creek RV Resort
Utah — Mountain Valley RV Resort
Canada — Bissell's Hideaway Resort, Camping La Cle Des Champs RV Resort, Fisherman's Cove Tent & Trailer Park, Holiday Park Resort, Woodland Park 🇨🇦



We've changed the name of this column! Starting with the April issue, RV Action Line is now titled RV Resolutions to more accurately reflect how this column benefits Trailer Life readers. — Ed.

EXTENDED WARRANTY WOE

Frustrated by having to pay for repairs to his air conditioner even though he had an extended warranty, a reader asked *RV Resolutions* for assistance. He wrote:

► I bought a new Dometic air conditioner for my RV last February. I also bought Dometic's 2 Plus 3 Full Service Contract, which is a three-year extended warranty. The air-conditioning unit worked fine when I brought it home, but when I went on a camping trip in March, it quit working.

When I returned home, I took the unit back to the dealer, Tour America RVs, where it was purchased. Tour America worked on it and finally got the air conditioning running again.

When I went to pick up the rig, I was told that I would be responsible for the amount not covered by the extended warranty. I originally purchased the extended warranty so I wouldn't have to pay for repairs. I am asking *RV Resolutions* for help in obtaining reimbursement for my out-of-pocket charges.

Darl Henderson, Miami, Florida



RV Resolutions contacted Dometic on Henderson's behalf. Soon thereafter, we heard from Henderson, who provided a happy ending to his dilemma. He wrote:

► Thanks for *RV Resolution's* help with resolving my problem with Dometic. The company contacted me and we have resolved the problem. Dometic was very punctual and nice to work with and settled the matter entirely in my favor.

D.H.

FLEXING FIFTH-WHEEL

Hoping to receive reimbursement for work done on his out-of-warranty fifth-wheel, a reader asked *RV Resolutions* for help. He wrote:

► We bought our fifth-wheel at Smokey's RV Center in Davenport, Iowa, in November 2005. The trailer, a 29-foot Keystone Laredo, has flexed back and forth the entire time we have owned it. When going over a bridge, we found out that the channels holding the fifth-wheel were not strong enough, as they were only 10-gauge metal. Camping World took pictures of the problem and sent them to Keystone RV. After five days, a reply came back that the trailer was too old. We had Camping World fix the problem and the trailer

has never pulled as well as it does since it has been fixed — no more flexing or any other issues. We would like to receive a refund for part or all of the money we spent out of pocket to fix this issue and we are asking *RV Resolutions* for help.

John E. Bolton, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

RV Resolutions contacted Keystone RV on Bolton's behalf. We received a response from Keystone RV that the company had resolved the issue to

Bolton's satisfaction. We also received a follow-up from Bolton. It read:

► Keystone RV and I have come to a satisfactory resolution of half the cost of \$4,512 to fix my fifth-wheel's flexing problem. Thank you *RV Resolutions* for your much-needed help. I'm sure Keystone will fix its problem as well, and thanks to Camping World in Anthony, Texas, for the repair.

J.B. 🚐

NEED HELP? » *RV Resolutions* is a forum for the settlement 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 Resolutions*, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Include copies of appropriate bills and correspondence as well as a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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Bluewater Rentals in Bluewater Key
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bluewaterkey.net

CROWLEY'S RIDGE PA

A scenic drive runs along the spine of this crescent-shaped rise that juts abruptly from the table-flat Mississippi River delta lands of Arkansas and Missouri

article by **Pamela Selbert**

photos by **Guy Selbert**

The St. Francis River, thickly lined with overhanging trees clear to the water on both sides, swings a wide, milk-chocolate arc past the tiny town of St. Francis, Arkansas (pop. 250). It outlines the west edge of the Missouri Bootheel, and helps shape the boundary between the Natural State's northeast corner and the Show-Me State.

Crowley's Ridge Parkway National Scenic Byway begins here at St. Francis. It follows the ridge, a crescent-shaped anomaly that ranges in width from 1 to 12 miles, towers some 200 feet above the table-flat Mississippi River Delta flood plain on either side of it and continues south to Helena. There, this oddity of nature ends abruptly at the Mississippi River.

Trenched through by the St. Francis River, the ridge actually continues north into Missouri, nearly to Cape Girardeau, but just the

Arkansas stretch is a national scenic byway, designated in 1998.

The ridge itself, St. Francis to Helena, spans 150 miles, while the parkway, with its numerous twists and turns, measures nearly 60 miles more. It's an elegant parkway, a serpentine route over rolling hills, passing through a lush, pastoral landscape, a world of hardwood forests, wide-open fields of feathery prairie grass and wildflowers, tree-statued parks with glittering lakes and dozens of small farms. There's also a string of sleepy burgs and a few larger, bustling communities with shops, restaurants and museums.

We've followed the drive several times over the years, and in both directions. It's fairly well marked both ways, but better north-to-south. Thus we recommend traveling this direction.

For simplicity's sake — because driving certain parts of the ridge would be difficult with our fifth-wheel in tow — we camped two nights at Crowley's Ridge State Park near Paragould, leaving our trailer there while touring the ridge's north half. Then we did the same at the elegant new Mississippi River State Park near Marianna

RKWAY

while touring the south end.

Crowley's Ridge, made up of clay and gravel topped with loess (German for "loose soil"), began to take shape more than 50 million years ago when the Gulf of Mexico, which had covered the region, receded, leaving behind sediment. At the time, the Mississippi River flowed west of the ridge, the Ohio River east of it, both larger and more powerful than their modern-day counterparts. The swift currents dug ever-deeper channels, leaving behind a sliver of land, the ridge.

The grinding action of glaciers to the north reduced rocks to "flour," or loess, which was carried south by wind and glacial melt-water, and deposited on the ridge. Earthquakes also played a role, said Tara Gillanders, interpreter at Mississippi River State Park, and lifted the ridge higher and tilted adjacent land, which in turn shifted the rivers away and prevented erosion. Thus, much of the biology atop the ridge is "unique in Arkansas," she said, more similar to Eastern forests.

Benjamin Crowley, for whom the ridge is named, was the first to settle here, in 1825, on a land grant he was given for his service in the War of

1812. At the time — and until the end of the 19th century — Crowley's Ridge provided the only reliably dry north-south route through this otherwise swampy part of the state. It served originally as a buffalo trail, then Indian trail, and eventually postal road and military route. Today's designated scenic drive follows a cobble of dozens of roads, sometimes leaving the ridge (where no roads are adequate) for several miles.

Our first stop (a short side trip) was at Chalk Bluff Natural Area just northwest of St. Francis (turn right off U.S. Highway 62 onto County Road 341, then right on County Road 347). During spring, summer and fall (this time, we were there in May), roadsides here — and elsewhere along the drive — are festive with wildflowers, thick swaths of white daisy-like oxeye, blue and purple asters, pink primroses, lavender vetch and yellow sunflowers, and the air is sweet with honeysuckle.

The 35-foot red-and-white-clay

bluff, which resembles chalk, hence the name, towers over the St. Francis River. Asphalt paths wind through the area, leading to the river (beware the acres of poison ivy), and placards along the way tell its story. The bluff, "one of the most important historical landmarks in Arkansas," marked a major crossing point for raids between Arkansas and Missouri during the Civil War. Finally, in July 1863 Union cavalry crossed and began a drive down Crowley's Ridge that ended with the capture of Little Rock two months later.

Return to the Parkway and continue south to Piggott, seat of Clay County (each of the eight counties the parkway crosses has a seat along it), with a quaint, flourishing downtown and the nearby Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Educational Center. Ernest Hemingway's second wife Pauline Pfeiffer's wealthy parents had a fine 1910 Queen Anne home, which the young couple visited often during their 13-year marriage. Hemingway enjoyed



Fishermen float by the excellent island campground on Bear Creek Lake in Mississippi River State Park. The 14 sites are reached by a causeway. (Above from left) A ruin of a barn near the ghost town of Bay Village. The 1888 courthouse of Greene County at Paragould.



CROWLEY'S RIDGE PARKWAY

quail hunting trips on the ridge, and in a barn-studio near the house, wrote much of his novel, *A Farewell to Arms*. Guided tours of the home are available.

Follow the drive to Greene County seat Paragould, established in 1882 when two rival railroads — led by Jay Gould and J.W. Paramore (hence the town's name) — laid tracks that crossed here. A fine, red-brick 1888 courthouse is here, and on its lawn a 7-foot-tall Statue of Liberty replica, a memorial to American war veterans. Murals recall the town's railroad heritage.



Crowley's Ridge State Park, one of the six originals of Arkansas' 52 state parks, is just outside the town, on Benjamin Crowley's thickly wooded homestead. The park's Lake Ponder includes a snack bar and bathhouse, and offers swimming and pedal boating, and nearby 31-acre Walcott Lake, with a boat launch and pier, offers fishing for a variety of stocked fish. Year-round camping (18 RV sites with water, electricity and dump site) is available.

A handful of miles ahead, 135-acre Lake Frierson State Park is adjacent a 350-acre lake of the same name that is considered one of the top fishing spots in northeast Arkansas. The park is especially lovely in spring, when the blooms of abundant dogwood trees dot the woods like spatters of buttermilk.

Continue to Jonesboro, pop. 57,263, the largest city in the Arkansas Delta, and seat of Craighead County. Arkansas

State University is here, as is the first-rate Forrest L. Wood Crowley's Ridge Nature Center, located at the ridge's widest section (12 miles).

Exhibits and a film here explain how the ridge came to be. A three-story "cutaway" to a background of recorded bird songs displays a cross section of loess with trees and numerous mounted animals native to the area. A 300-gallon aquarium contains a dozen creatures that call Crowley's Ridge home: an alligator snapper, red-ear slider (water turtle), spotted gar, American alligator and others. Outside, a path winds through a swamp typical of the area. The tannin-black water is rife with fish and turtles.

Continue south to Lake Poinsett State Park at Harrisburg. There's fishing on the 640-acre lake, and fishing boats, canoes and kayaks can be rented. There are also hiking trails,

Young visitors at Crowley's Ridge Nature Center in Jonesboro, Arkansas, get a close-up view of one of the exhibits that showcase the area's wildlife.

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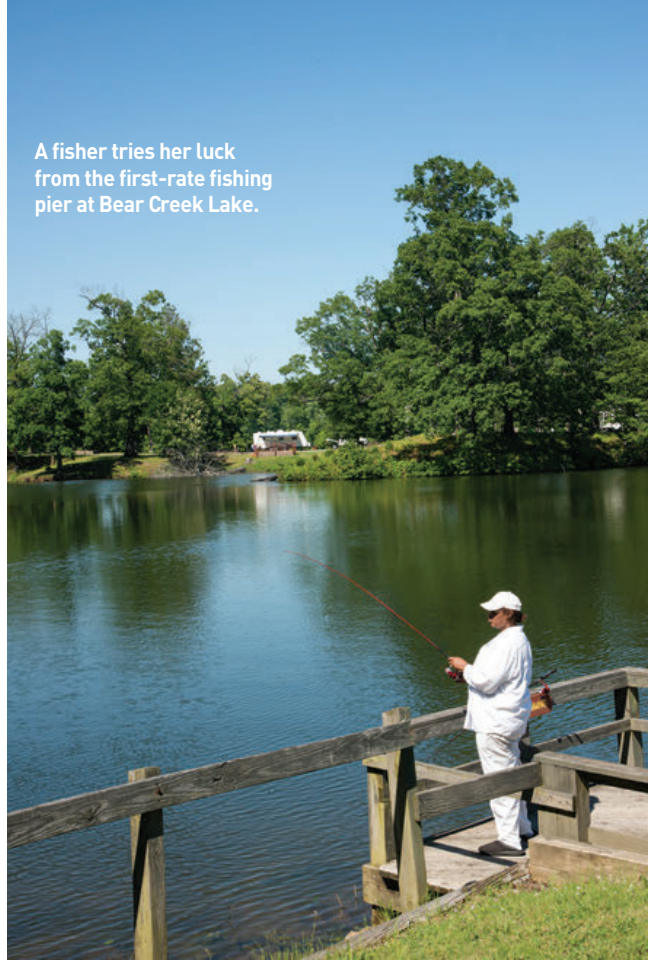
Fifteen or so miles south along the parkway, near Birdeye, Arkansas State Veterans Cemetery, which includes a columbarium, is newly opened. It's a lovely, peaceful place, lavish with bright wildflowers.

Ahead at Levesque we suggest taking a 10-mile side trip east to Parkin Archeological State Park on the St. Francis River. Native Americans lived at the 17-acre site, now a National Historic Landmark, from A.D. 1000 to 1550. Though many other similar archaeological mound-builder sites in the region have been destroyed, Parkin is well-preserved and opens a window onto life during that time period.

Return to the parkway and continue south to magnificent Village Creek State Park outside Cross County seat Wynne. The 7,000-acre park, located in a long, wide valley, lies along the Old Military Trail (later the Memphis-Little Rock Road), which, completed in 1829, provided the first real access to the area for settlers, and also served as an Indian Removal route between 1832 and 1850. Sections of the old road, sculpted deep in the loess by the passage of many feet and wagons, can still be seen. The park offers fishing, swimming and boating on its two lakes, a picnic area, visitor center, special events, hiking and horse trails, and a fine campground.

Forrest City, pop. 14,774, seat of St. Francis County and named for Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, is

A fisher tries her luck from the first-rate fishing pier at Bear Creek Lake.



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CROWLEY'S RIDGE PARKWAY

ahead. Crowley's Ridge, visible from south of town, stretches — imposing and formidable — along the eastern horizon.

A placard in the town notes that in 1866 (a year after the war ended) General Forrest and 1,000 workmen pitched camp here, and within two years had cut through the ridge and laid track for the Memphis and Little Rock Railroad. Trains soon ran regularly, creating a thriving business district, and by 1892, most buildings in the town were of brick. St. Francis County Museum (open Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.) now occupies the once-fine gray clapboard J.O. Rush House.

South of town — and growing thicker the farther south you go — heart-leaved kudzu vines are swallowing stretches of roadside. The vines, planted by the Civilian Conservation Corps 80 years ago in an unsuccessful attempt to stop erosion, though lovely, are engulfing the trees, turning them into surreal, green, Easter-Island-like statues. Outside Marianna, the



At Chalk Bluff, the St. Francis River, which is thickly lined with overhanging trees, cuts through Crowley's Ridge, separating Arkansas from Missouri.

parkway crosses the L'Anguille River, creating the only break in the Arkansas segment of the ridge.

Drive through Marianna, seat of Lee County, where a small park in the heart of town displays a statue of General Robert E. Lee atop a 25-foot-tall obelisk, and continue to 24,000-acre St. Francis National Forest. Elegant Mississippi River State Park, which

eventually will encompass 536 acres, is here, newly sculpted from the forest.

The park offers fishing at Storm Creek Lake, and wildlife viewing opportunities at the Audubon Great River Birding Trail (deer, waterfowl, bald eagles, gray and fox squirrels, alligators and more). Bear Creek Lake Recreation Area includes one of the finest campgrounds we've seen, immaculately

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groomed, with 14 paved, full-hookup sites that provide spectacular views of the lake and surrounding woods.

The final 16 miles of Crowley's Ridge Parkway, this stretch also called the St. Francis Scenic Byway, run south from the park toward Helena along a lonely serpentine road of well-maintained gravel. Trees along it weave a green canopy high overhead, and here and there you pass thick stands of cane, 12-foot-high yellow stalks with feathery green leaves.

Occasional unnamed roads bored through the thick loess meander off the main route for interesting exploring. We followed such a road just past the turnoff for Horner Neck Lake, to a brown-crystal stream, its still water perfectly mirroring overhanging trees and vines. Elsewhere, the byway climbs high for wide panoramas and periodic glimpses of the Mississippi River.

The last 4 miles of the drive are paved, from Storm Creek Lake Recreation Area south to Helena, the

state's second-oldest incorporated town, and end of the line at Arkansas Highway 242. The antique cotton-and-riverboat town, rich in history, was home to early Native Americans as far back as 500 B.C., and was the site of an important Civil War battle, when in July 1863, Union forces, which had occupied Helena a year earlier, thwarted a Confederate attempt to retake the city. Placards at newly dedicated Freedom

Park tell the stories of Freedom in Helena and President Lincoln's Proclamation of Emancipation.

Now, Helena is home to the popular annual Arkansas King Biscuit Blues Festival, and to the first-rate Delta Cultural Center. Also a visitor center for the parkway, it offers a wealth of information about tree-shrouded Crowley's Ridge, an imposing, dominant presence in the town. 🚚

TRAVEL INFORMATION

Arkansas Delta Byways

State University, Arkansas
870-972-2803, www.deltabyways.com

Arkansas State Parks

Little Rock, Arkansas
501-682-1191, www.arkansasstateparks.com

Crowley's Ridge State Park

Walcott, Arkansas
870-573-6751

Lake Frierson State Park

Jonesboro, Arkansas
870-932-2615

Lake Poinsett State Park

Harrisburg, Arkansas
870-578-2064

Mississippi River State Park

Marianna, Arkansas
870-295-4040

Parkin Archeological State Park

Parkin, Arkansas
870-755-2500

Village Creek State Park

Wynne, Arkansas
870-238-9406

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COLORADO

article by Irene Middleman Thomas

ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH

The Pikes Peak region offers rugged adventure, Wild West towns, red-rock formations, and top-flight dining and nightlife

If you're dreaming of a Colorado Rocky Mountain High vacation, the Pikes Peak region, just 60 miles south of Denver, stands tall — very tall — in offering spectacular beauty and a wealth of varied attractions. There are also many well-situated RV parks from which to choose. This area encompasses the second-largest city in Colorado, Colorado Springs, along with the delightful historic community of Manitou Springs, the pretty mining town of Cripple Creek (now dotted with casinos but proudly showing off its Victorian-era past), Cañon City (home

of the awe-inspiring Royal Gorge) and more than 50 area attractions.

Experience the serenity, history and recreational excitement of the Rocky Mountains' majesty, along with visits to still-present Wild West towns. Take in thrilling white-water rafting, canoeing and kayaking, fishing for trout and bass, and hiking. You can take a cog railway ride to the top of America's most famous mountain, 14,115-foot Pikes Peak, where Katharine Lee Bates aptly found her inspiration for writing "America the Beautiful." Gaze in amazement at the towering red-rock

formations at Garden of the Gods, stroll the grounds at the gorgeous European-estatelike Broadmoor Resort, visit a world-class zoo situated dramatically on a mountainside (where you can hand-feed giraffes) or even visit Santa at his "North Pole." View stalagmites and stalactites at Cave of the Winds, or tour authentic Native American cliff dwellings, take a narrow gauge train ride through the oh-so-skinny Royal Gorge under the highest bridge in the

Crystal Reservoir is in the foreground, with Pikes Peak in the background. The area offers many recreational opportunities such as hiking, picnicking, non-motorized boating and fishing.

United States, or take in a tour of one of the several castles in the region.

Simple, natural pleasures include hiking to waterfalls and visiting old mines (some still in operation), but you can also enjoy a dressed-up nightlife with top-flight dining, dinner theaters, casinos and live music.

Nestled between Garden of the Gods and Pikes Peak lies the delightful town of Manitou Springs. “Manitou,” a Native American word for “spirit,” aptly describes this beautiful mountain community. Eleven naturally carbonated mineral-spring fountains, located throughout this historic town, run free for all who wish to enjoy the healing benefits. The Ute, Cheyenne and other Native Americans considered this area sacred for its healing springs and clean mountain air.

Manitou Springs is a vibrant artisan community, home to world-class art, music, theater and sidewalk sculpture displays. The Historic District is lined with unique art galleries, one-of-a-kind gift shops and trading posts with handcrafted Native American treasures. Home to dozens of artists and art galleries, Manitou also offers internationally famous historic restaurants.

The Pikes Peak Cog Railway, constructed more than 100 years ago, takes intrepid visitors to the top of Pikes Peak, elevation 14,115 feet. It is the highest railroad in North America. Pikes Peak is the backdrop for the historic city of Colorado Springs, and is the 31st-highest peak out of 54 Colorado “14ers” (peaks with a summit higher than 14,000 feet). From the summit, you’ll see panoramic views of the Continental Divide, Colorado Springs and Cripple Creek. There are three ways to get to



(Above from left) For \$2, you can feed giraffes at the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo in the African Rift Valley. One of the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo’s famed elephants takes a dip in the new Encounter Africa exhibit.

the Pikes Peak summit: on foot, by car, or on the cog railway, which takes three hours and 10 minutes round trip. Remarkably, the mountain is accessible year-round on all but the heaviest snow days by both the cog railway and the Pikes Peak Highway.

The Pikes Peak Highway (no trailers are allowed on this road) is a 38-mile round-trip partially paved toll road that climbs 6,715 vertical feet from base to summit, with picnic grounds, educational programs, visitor facilities and interpretive trails. It travels through four distinct life zones, from the foothills to the tundra. At the top is a huge gift shop where you can try “the world’s highest altitude doughnuts.”

Back in Manitou Springs, at the historic Cave of the Winds, visitors can descend into 20 deep caverns filled with stalagmites and stalactites. This is the area’s oldest attraction in the region and was opened in 1880. Just five minutes down the road from Cave of the Winds, you’ll find the Manitou

Cliff Dwellings and Museum, where you will see authentic Ancestral Puebloan Indian homes dating from A.D. 1100 to 1300, moved here from southern Colorado in the same general area as Mesa Verde. There are also many hand-crafts and artifacts in the museum and, occasionally, Indian dancers perform.

Just a short drive away, the Garden of the Gods Park is a 1,323-acre registered National Natural Landmark with gorgeous scenery and recreational opportunities. Dramatic views of 300-foot towering sandstone rock formations against a backdrop of snowcapped Pikes Peak and brilliant blue skies will keep your cameras busy. This world-class visitor center is the most-visited attraction in the Pikes Peak region with an educational, 14-minute HD multimedia show explaining “How Did Those Red Rocks Get There?”

Moving onto Colorado Springs, there are myriad activities and sights — so much that you will be forced

(Below) Take in 360-degree breathtaking views of 300-foot sandstone rock formations from the terrace at Garden of the Gods Visitor and Nature Center.



COLORADO ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH

to be choosy. The Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center is acclaimed worldwide and was the first facility of its kind to offer arts education, a theater and an art museum under one roof. The Broadmoor Hotel, an exquisite gem, is akin to a European estate. I enjoyed gazing at the historic Prohibition-era exhibits of forbidden liquor bottles and photos, and a walk around the lake. Better yet, is indulging in a Sunday brunch, getting a drink at the cozy bar or splurging on a spa treatment. Right behind the hotel is the lovely, intimate Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, America's only mountain zoo — so bring good walking shoes — with a collection of more than 750 exotic animals, including giraffes that you can feed.

Another delight in Colorado Springs is the U.S. Olympic Training Center that offers free public tours year-round Monday through Saturday. Its Visitor Center hosts approximately 140,000 people each year, and it's the primary facility that provides the general public with information about the U.S. Olympic Committee, U.S. Olympic Training Centers and the Olympic Movement. The center includes the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame Rotunda, the U.S. Olympic Store, indoor/outdoor patio eating facilities, a 225-seat auditorium and meeting facilities. It also features numerous art exhibitions, Olympic memorabilia displays including interactive kiosks at which guests can obtain information on all American Olympic athletes. Just outside, the Carol Grotnes Belk Sculpture Garden features four bronze sculptures and a 12-foot-tall Olympic Ring Wall amidst a garden of flowers and foliage. Overhead, the rooftop terrace has an Olympic flame display and offers panoramic views of the entire complex.

A one-hour drive southwest of Colorado Springs, the spectacular Royal Gorge Bridge and Park (currently closed due to fire damage, with an expected reopen date of summer 2014) is a not-to-be-missed thrill. You can walk or drive (if you dare — I didn't!) across this suspension bridge, which is among the 10 highest bridges in the world, and spans the gorge 955 feet above the roaring, rollicking Arkansas River.

Pikes Peak Cog Railway is the highest railway in the United States, traveling higher than 14,000 feet.



PHOTO COURTESY GOLDEN EAGLE CAMPGROUND

The Golden Eagle Campground is a rustic facility that's also a wildlife preserve. The campground has a 5-mile hiking trail and is ideally situated for access to the Pikes Peak region's varied activities.

On the way down, stop at the May Natural History Museum, where you'll see more than 8,000 of the world's most beautiful and unusual invertebrates, including giant tropical insects from around the world.

About an hour from either Colorado or Manitou Springs is the old mining and Wild West town of Cripple Creek at an altitude of 9,494 feet. The city is full of local color and features plenty of attractions — beyond the casinos that have fueled its renaissance. The town's herd of friendly donkeys wander freely and love to be petted. The last week of June is the town's Donkey Derby Days, with races and other fun events. You can also visit the grave of Susan Anderson, M.D., who was the impetus for the television program "Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman."

The 11,600-square-foot beautifully designed Cripple Creek Heritage Center, on the right side of the highway just a bit before you enter town, is no typical visitor center.





Manitou Cliff Dwellings is where visitors can view an authentic ancestral Puebloan Indian village dating from A.D. 1100 to 1300.

I recommend taking in the excellent half-hour movie depicting the town's evolution in this extraordinary, high-technology and interactive museumlike site. The facility is staffed by friendly, knowledgeable historians who are delighted to help you learn about Cripple Creek's founders, rabble-rousers, the rich mining legacy, progressive railroads, geography, Native Americans, plants and animals. Free of charge, the Cripple Creek Heritage Center is open year-round, except Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day.

The Jail Museum is chilling and fascinating — visitors see the actual cramped cells in the original jail once called "one of cruelest jails in the United States" which was in use until 1992. On exhibit are shivs and other homemade weapons confiscated from inmates since the Gold Rush days.

The Cripple Creek and Victor Narrow Gauge Railroad, a 15-ton, flawlessly restored steam locomotive, takes passengers on a 4-mile round trip, and departs every 45 minutes each day from Memorial weekend to early October. The journey emulates the experience that mineworkers had riding the Midland Terminal Roadbed to and from the excavation sites each day. Conductors tell tales about the life

and times of the miners, businessmen, fortune seekers and the ladies of the night who accompanied them during the Gold Rush heyday at the turn of the 20th century.

Get down and deep into the Mollie Kathleen Gold Mine for an exciting tour of a vertical mine shaft and hard rock mine that was started, owned and operated by a woman, Mollie Kathleen Gortner. Even more striking is that it is still operational — and complies with federal safety standards — and offers a subterranean tour to a depth of 1,000 feet below the surface of the earth. The mine produced \$5 million in gold from 1891 to 1961, which converted into today's standards was a substantial amount. Tours are guided and narrated by miners. Guests ride an air-powered mining train, witness an 1890s steam hoist in full operation, and learn how drilling and blasting explosives were set.

One thing is certain in the Pikes Peak region — you can stay busy all day, every day, and not see everything. Or simply soak in the Rocky Mountain majesty and relax. Rock climbing, hang gliding, whitewater rafting, mountain biking, horseback riding, spelunking — it's all here. No wonder Pikes Peak is the inspiration for America the Beautiful. 🚚

WHERE TO STAY

Cripple Creek Hospitality House & RV Park 800-500-2513, www.cchospitalityhouse.com

▶ The Cripple Creek Hospitality House, built in 1901, is a hotel and event center, as well as an RV park, and is located right by the downtown area of Cripple Creek. Pull-through sites, full hookups, bathhouse, laundry and game area. The Hospitality House served as the Teller County Hospital during the district's Gold Rush heyday.

Garden of the Gods RV Resort

866-994-0543, www.coloradocampground.com

▶ With expansive views of Pikes Peak amidst a forested setting, more than 175 sites and a spacious indoor/outdoor pavilion, this Colorado Springs campground is convenient to Manitou Springs and Old Colorado City. New 65-foot, executive pull-through sites, picnic tables and cable TV, swimming pools, showers, laundry facilities, TV lounge and game room. Pet-friendly Garden of the Gods RV Resort organizes social events such as ice cream socials and cookouts between Memorial and Labor Days.

Golden Eagle Campground of Colorado Springs

800-666-3841, 719-576-0450,
www.maymuseum-camp-rvpark.com

▶ This rustic campground opened in 1961 by the May family also owns and operates the adjacent May Natural History Museum (with one of the world's largest private collections of giant tropical insects) as well as the Museum of Space Exploration. Open May 1 to September 30.

Goldfield RV Campground

888-471-0495, www.goldfieldrvcampground.com

▶ This densely treed campground is very close to both Manitou Springs and Colorado City, although it is in Colorado Springs. It has been family owned and operated for 50 years. Fifty 30/50 amp large sites, many shaded, 12 pull-through sites, pet-friendly, Wi-Fi and cable TV available. A resident manager is on the premises, working in the Western-style log cabin office.

Lone Duck Campground

800-776-5925, www.loneduckcamp.com

▶ Located 25 minutes from downtown Colorado Springs, at the base of Pikes Peak with a 7,600-foot elevation, Lone Duck offers full hook-up sites with electric, water and sewer. Each site has some form of shade, trees and grass, and some are adjacent mountain streams. A \$4 pancake breakfast is offered daily. The fishing pond is spring-fed and stocked with rainbow trout. There's a heated pool and a splash pad. The Lone Duck has high-speed free Internet access. The campground is open the first weekend in May to the last weekend of September.

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IN SEARCH OF CALIFORNIA'S GOLD

HISTORY COMES TO LIFE IN THE 19TH-CENTURY MINING TOWN OF COLUMBIA, WHERE THE SIGHTS AND SMELLS OF THE OLD WEST CAN STILL BE EXPERIENCED

article and photos by **Dave G. Houser**

The Columbia Stage awaits passengers at the Wells Fargo Express office at Columbia State Historic Park.

I'm feeling silly, having paid good money to sloop a pile of wet gravel about in a pie tin with the idea of striking it rich. My eyes are straining as my hopes rise and fall with each imagined glimpse of a gold flake. If nothing more, I'm gaining valuable insight into the fervor and frustration that must have gone hand in hand during the great California Gold Rush.

I'll gain even further insight into the largest peacetime migration in American history during my day-and-a-half visit to Columbia State Historic Park, off Highway 49 near Sonora, some

three hours east of San Francisco.

Gold was discovered here in 1850, little more than a year after the fabled strike at Sutter's Mill set the big rush in motion. It all came about when Dr. Thaddeus Hildreth, with his brother, George, and a handful of other prospectors, made camp here. They found gold and word was soon out about the big discovery at Hildreth's Diggings. Its original name was soon changed to American Camp and from that to Columbia as the population spiraled from a few hundred prospectors to 6,000 frenzied souls in a matter



COLUMBIA RETAINS
MUCH OF THE SAME
APPEARANCE AS WHEN
MINERS THROGGED
ITS STREETS

(Above) The Jack Douglass Saloon was one of nearly 50 watering holes that prospered during Columbia's Gold Rush heyday.
(Below left to right) The interior of the Wells Fargo Express office, a blacksmith shop, and the printing office where the *Columbia Gazette*, the most important of the town's several newspapers, was first published in the fall of 1852.



of weeks, making it the state's second most populous community. By 1854, Columbia boasted four banks, eight hotels and nearly 50 saloons.

Much of the old mining center has been preserved — more than 30 buildings in all — providing a remarkable window on life in the Mother Lode during the mid-19th century. Wandering the streets of this 12-square-block time-capsule town — where the only vehicular traffic is a Wells Fargo stagecoach that totes visitors around for a small fee — you'll pass the miners' boarding house, a dance hall and an 1861 schoolhouse. There's a newspaper office, livery stable, several saloons and a Chinese temple and herb shop. And, of course, an apothecary and a dentist's office with fiendish looking instruments that bear a close resemblance to tools seen in the town's blacksmith shop.

By 1860, when the easily mined Placer gold had played out, Columbia began to decline, but not before producing nearly a billion dollars worth of gold — at today's value. Although the town suffered a couple of fires through the years, along with vandalism and wear and tear from the elements, Columbia survived and was never completely deserted, retaining much of the same appearance as when miners thronged its streets. Recognizing an opportunity to preserve a typical gold-rush town as an example of one

of the most colorful eras in American history, the California State Legislature in 1945 created Columbia State Historic Park. The town's historic importance was further recognized when it was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1961.

Columbia Museum occupies the sturdy brick Knapp building, exhibiting different mining techniques and revealing much about the lives of miners willing to endure the hardships involved in the difficult and sometimes dangerous work of extracting nuggets from icy Sierra streams. For every lucky miner more than a hundred failed. The cost of living was astronomical: a loaf of bread going for \$5, a denim shirt for \$50 and an ordinary shovel for \$100. Truth is, the shopkeepers of Columbia — eventual millionaires Mark Hopkins and Leland Stanford, investors who formed the Central Pacific Railroad, among them — gained the greatest fortunes here selling food, liquor, hardware and dry goods.

I'd camped the evening of my arrival at the nearby 49er RV Ranch with plans to spend a day in Columbia — but as evening approached, I realized there was much more I wanted to see and do, so I decided to take a room at the 1865 City Hotel.

A pair of Columbia's old hostelrys — the City Hotel and its sister the Fallon Hotel — have been brought back to life, authentically restored as 19th-century country inns and decorated to the hilt



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IN SEARCH OF CALIFORNIA'S GOLD



(Above left) A Columbia State Historic Park interpreter demonstrates gold-panning techniques to a young visitor. (Above right) Columbia's fire department and drugstore are among the town's more than 30 surviving 19th-century buildings.

with Victorian antiques, custom-crafted wall coverings and period lithographs. The charming 10-room City Hotel where I landed features an extraordinary gourmet restaurant, ably operated by park concessionaire Briggs Hospitality. There's a bar as well, dubbed the What Cheer Saloon, that serves what those in the know say is the best lunch in town. Room rates are reasonable enough, ranging from \$115.50 to \$148.50 based on double occupancy. Briggs also operates a group of nicely furnished cottages, ideal for large families/groups or for extended stays.

While I certainly didn't get rich panning for gold, I did strike a bonanza that evening at City Hotel's restaurant, ordering up a filet of poached Pacific salmon, artfully garnished with pickled rhubarb and a lemon beurre blanc (a rich, tangy sauce) and served with butternut squash risotto. Not exactly mining camp vittles, mind you. Later I capped off a wonderfully informative and entertaining day by attending a performance of the Sierra Repertory Theatre at historic Fallon House Theatre.

Both hotels remain as faithful to period décor as possible while implementing modern conveniences such as indoor plumbing, heating and air conditioning. Blessedly, however, there are no phones or TVs. Each room has a half-bath, and a shower basket is provided for the trip down the hall to the shared shower room. An included continental breakfast buffet is available for guests of both hotels.

Columbia's streets are lined with a variety of shops and boutiques, many specializing in 19th-century goods. Restaurants, saloons, ice-cream parlors, candy stores and a tea house stand ready to quench a thirst, satisfy a sweet tooth and fill your appetite. Be sure to try a cold bottle of locally made sarsaparilla to get a taste of the Old West.

Park staff and volunteers with the Friends of Columbia State Historic Park host a busy year-round roster of living

history programs. During Gold Rush Days, held the first and second Saturday of each month from 1 to 4 p.m., park docents and volunteers in period clothing lead special programs and various hands-on activities.

"Columbia Diggins," staged annually (May 29 to June 1 for 2014), is a major re-enactment of things as they were back in 1852 at the rough and raucous tent city then known as Hildreth's Diggins. No doubt, this is the park's crowning event, drawn from painstaking research into the details of daily life in tent towns that popped up everywhere in the Mother Lode during the early days of the great California Gold Rush.

"We can't know exactly how life was like for those early residents," says Amber Cantisano, the park's interpreter who coordinates the event, "but we spend a lot of time reading their journals, newspapers and studying archaeological

FOR MORE INFORMATION

City and Fallon hotels and Columbia Cottages
209-532-1479, www.briggshospitalityllc.com

Columbia Chamber of Commerce
209-536-1672, www.visitcolumbiacalifornia.com

Columbia State Historic Park
209-588-9128, www.parks.ca.gov

49er RV Ranch
209-532-4978, www.49errvpark.com
The Good Sam member rate is \$45 per night — but ask about the two-night special rate of \$49 (subject to dates available).

Marble Quarry RV Park
866-677-8464, www.marblequarry.com
Located a quarter-mile east of Columbia State Historic Park, 68 RV sites with full hookups, swimming pool, playground and store.

remains to cobble together a fairly accurate picture of the times.”

During the four-day event, visitors can roam through the tent town, enjoy entertainment at the theater, step into the saloon and order a sarsaparilla, or browse in the authentically re-created Brown’s Mercantile. Bakers produce bread in a stone and brick oven, and docents demonstrate a variety of early mining techniques.

“There is really nothing like it anywhere else,” says Cantisano, “it’s the closest thing to time travel you’ll find. It is both amazing and educational.”

Conveniently located off Highway 49, reaching Columbia is an easy and scenic drive that neighbors other historic towns in the area’s foothills, including Sonora, Angels Camp and Jamestown, making it a popular destination for day-trippers and weekenders alike. Columbia State Historic Park is also easy on the budget with free admission, free parking (with plenty of room for RVs) and free docent-guided tours of the town. You can even bowl for free in an antique bowling alley next to the museum.

The state park is open daily, year-round. It is a real town and never actually closes, although some businesses do close on major holidays. Most businesses are open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., but restaurants, hotels, saloons and some other establishments have longer hours. The Columbia Museum is open everyday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. except on Thanksgiving and Christmas.

RV campers will find that Columbia’s history isn’t limited to the state park. For example, when you tie up at the 49er RV Ranch you’ll be experiencing the Gold Country’s oldest and arguably best campground. The ranch has been providing camping since 1852 when it began serving the influx of 49ers searching for Columbia’s bonanza of Placer gold. Today’s modern amenities, however, which include full hookups with 30/50 amp electric, water/sewer, clean showers, 30-channel cable TV, free Wi-Fi service and a fully stocked camp store, make for a whole lot more comfort than the early miners might have enjoyed. 📶

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Winnebago Trend 23L

European styling and a new platform provide economical RVing for the whole family

OK, I'll admit it. I didn't want to like the new Winnebago Trend Class C. It's certainly not because I have anything against Winnebago, as the company has one of the broadest, high-quality product lines in the industry and is widely known for its fresh, innovative thinking. And it's not because I don't like small Class C motorhomes, although I do think some are lacking in their execution. No, in the case of the Trend, my trepidation originated with the styling. The Ram ProMaster chassis (the North American version of the Fiat Ducato) is built with a front fascia designed for easy replacement in the event of a midtown fender bender. A great feature for the commercial applications that originally spurred its creation, but not exactly what most would call stylish. In fact, one onlooker likened it to a cattle guard. And its single rear wheels, tucked far beneath the body, reminded me of a big kid trying to ride his little brother's bike.

But I liked it anyway. And the more time I spent with it, the more I liked it.

The reason has to do with how well this motorhome works for its intended purpose — but also the potential it

represents for the future of RVing. The ProMaster opens up a new world of possibilities — not just for consumers, but manufacturers as well. By its own estimation, Winnebago says the ProMaster chassis will carve several thousand dollars off the sticker price of any alternatives it offered previously.

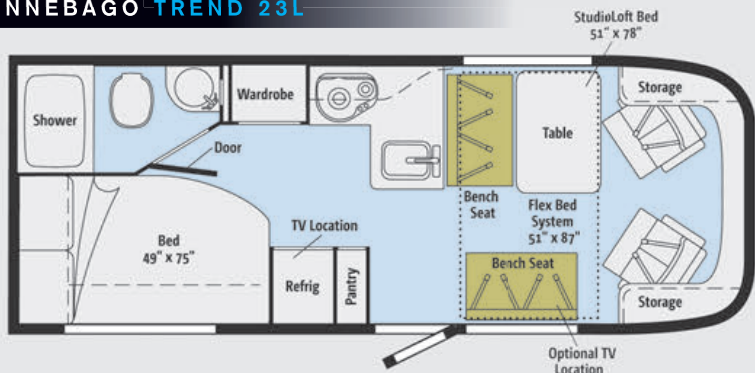
But cost is only part of the equation. The ProMaster chassis carries with it a number of uncommon benefits, not the least of which is an unprecedented array of 35 safety features that includes anti-lock brakes with brake assist, six air bags, electronic stability control, traction control, hill start assist and much more. There's even one feature called Drift Compensation Technology, which can detect conditions such as road crown and side winds, and adjust the steering system to compensate for pulling and/or drifting.

Winnebago is also leveraging Chrysler's U-Connect multi-media system, making it standard in the Trend, and its sister product, the Itasca Viva. U-Connect offers some very useful features for RVers, including Bluetooth hands-free phone functionality, hands-free text reply capability, and a

(Far right, top to bottom) The motorized StudioLoft descends from the ceiling with the touch of a button. The curbside bench seat and dinette convert into a second bed. Cab offers a simple layout with logically placed switchgear and gauges. The navigation unit on the prototype motorhome was an after-market product; production models will use Chrysler's U-Connect system.



WINNEBAGO TREND 23L



full-color, 5-inch touchscreen with GPS navigation and a backup camera — features that, quite frankly, I think every motorhome should have.

The ProMaster is unconventional in other ways, as well. First and foremost, it is a front-wheel-drive configuration, which may seem odd at first, until you consider the functional aspects. Front-wheel-drive offers better control in inclement weather, which is why the bulk of passenger cars on the market today use this configuration. Second, and something RVers can certainly appreciate, is that it eliminates the need for a doghouse between the driver and front passenger seats, so the floor is flat and the foot wells roomy.

Stepping into the cockpit, there are numerous similarities to the popular Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis, including the dash-mounted shifter (with manual shift function), firm, manually adjustable seats and rubber flooring. However, the controls in the ProMaster are far more intuitive and easy to use than they are in the German-designed Sprinter. Three knobs are all that's required to adjust the climate control, and the speedometer/tachometer are laid out in a very legible dial arrangement. There's also a driver information center between the two gauges that can relay myriad information, from the mundane (door ajar) to the miniscule (ours notified us of a license plate light that was burned out!).

Initially at least, Winnebago is offering the Trend in two floorplans: the



23B, with its large rear bath, and the 23L, which features a 49-by-75-inch bed in the curbside corner. For our test, Winnebago furnished a preproduction 23L, which, while lacking some of the final details of the production units, was close enough to production for our evaluation. We loaded it up with gear and headed for California's high desert.

The ProMaster's Chrysler 3.6-liter Pentastar V-6 has been recognized as one of the best engines available on the market today — but powering a half-ton truck and an 8,000-plus-pound motorhome are two very different things. Regardless of this fact, the Trend feels very lively at drive-off, thanks (in part) to a low 3.90:1 first gear ratio (compared to 3.00:1 in the current six-speed automatic in Ram 1500-series trucks). With 280 horsepower on tap, the motorhome had no problem climbing a 6 percent grade at 65 MPH, although manually shifting into fourth gear before the grade is recommended to keep the engine in its torque peak. And owing to its commercial nature, the engine roar can be quite pronounced at higher engine RPM, although it's very acceptable during highway cruising.

Likewise, the suspension is designed for heavy use, and is a bit bumpy over expansion joints and such — but the flip side is that the coach felt very stable even during high crosswinds, and exhibits excellent handling. Speaking of which, the ProMaster's

turning circle is unbelievably tight — we were able to perform a U-turn on a city street with absolutely no drama. And the four-wheel disc brakes, with their Brembo calipers, had excellent pedal feel and stopped the motorhome effortlessly.

For years, we've criticized some coach manufacturers for providing sleeping quarters for several guests, but belted seating positions for just two. That's certainly not the case with the Trend — in fact, this coach is the first to have three-point seat belts (like the ones used by the driver/front passenger) in the dinette area — something traveling families will doubtlessly appreciate. However, our passengers didn't enjoy sitting here for very long, as the smooth, Ultraleather upholstery made for a lot of slipping and sliding, and the padding was a bit thin for our taste. Personally, I'd prefer it if Winnebago made the seat thicker and upholstered it in cloth, or at least offered cloth as an option. Likewise, the curbside bench seat also has two belted seating positions but, again, these seats are slippery during travel. Also, the anchors for the belts extend down into the doorway for the storage bay underneath, which we thought odd — but Winnebago says it will address this in future models.

It was late afternoon by the time we arrived at our site in the Mojave Desert, so we set up camp and got ready to



Bath area is surprisingly roomy, with a large shower and sink. Residential-style brushed-nickel faucet is a nice touch.

prepare a simple dinner. The Trend has a kitchen typical of these small Class C units, featuring a two-burner stove and sink with glass covers. Something fairly uncommon, however, is the cabinetry. Not only is it good looking and well constructed, there's also plenty of it — I've tested full-size Class A motorhomes that didn't have this much space in the kitchen. And the countertop extension gives the mobile chef adequate room for prep duties.

At first glance, the dining area

(Below left) The Trend's 49-by-75-inch bed has unique, adjustable backrests. The TV above the fridge can pivot for viewing from living or bedroom areas. (Below right) The galley and adjacent wardrobe have plenty of storage space, and cabinetry is well constructed. A countertop extension allows for more prep space. Forward-facing dinette has two three-point seatbelts.



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looks odd, as there's only the one, forward-facing bench at the dining table. For additional seating, the driver/front passenger seats swivel rearward to become the other two dinette seats. We can't speak for how well this works, as our prototype didn't have swiveling seats in it, but it seemed like it would do the job. Likewise, a table extension allows another diner (or perhaps two small ones) to sit at the end of the table on the curbside bench. That's a total of five adults — more than most dinettes in full-size coaches can handle.

TV placement is always a challenge, especially in a smaller motorhome like this one. Winnebago placed a 22-inch LCD TV in a recess above the refrigerator, and it's on an arm so it can be viewed from either the living or bedroom area. Because the fixed dinette bench faces forward, that means the TV must be viewed from the swiveling cockpit seats (putting that small TV kind of far away) or from the curbside bench, which means watching TV with your head turned to the left. And if viewed from the rear bed, the controls for the AM/FM/DVD player are on the other side, near the entry door. It's not ideal, but again, space is limited, so we made due.

Just to the rear of the galley on the street side is a wardrobe with plenty of room for a couple's hanging clothes, plus more drawers. And in the streetside corner is a surprisingly roomy bath, with a good-size shower, a foot-flush toilet and a large sink finished in what looks like solid-surface material. Mounted just underneath the sink is the control for the tankless water heater system, as well as a water-pump switch, which is always appreciated. In general, the switches throughout the coach are logically placed and within reach.

When it comes time to turn in for the evening, you've got options. Boy, do you. In the living area, the dinette table swivels down to meet the forward-facing bench, and the curbside bench pulls out like a big drawer to fill the gap. Arrange the seat and back padding appropriately, and voilà! You've

got the 51-by-87-inch Flex Bed System. A more impressive option, however, is the 51-by-78-inch StudioLoft bed that descends from the ceiling via a power switch and stops about 4 feet from the floor. Now, you've got a bunk bed arrangement that can sleep four; a supplied ladder helps the top sleeper(s) gain access to the StudioLoft. When stowed, the bed looks like part of the ceiling and doesn't compromise headroom very much — but if you're much taller than 6 feet, you might need to duck a little here.

The rear 49-by-75-inch bed holds more surprises. Besides being a cozy place to catch some shut-eye, the bed allows individual adjustment of the backrests. The mattress is bisected at the top half, and underneath this section are two corresponding panels with pull straps. Pull one of the straps up, and the panel ratchets up into place; pulling it all the way up allows the backrest to fall flat again. Lift on the front of the bed, and you've got storage space for the StudioLoft ladder and privacy curtains for the cab windows, as well as anything else you want to stow. Above the bed are reading lights underneath the overhead cabinet, and the thermostat control is at the foot of the bed. A privacy curtain is another nice touch.

You might have noticed that we haven't discussed options — and that's because there aren't that many. Winnebago offers the Trend in one well-equipped version, with only a few available features. For example, the 23L had Aosta Cherry cabinetry (\$504), a heated drainage system (\$259) and an applique package in the cab area (\$259). The option sheet also showed a 19-inch second LCD TV (\$371) for the area above the bench seat, but it hadn't been installed in the prototype. This brought the total as-tested price to \$91,844 — well below the cost of a comparably equipped Sprinter-based coach.

The combination of the European-inspired Trend and the Ram ProMaster chassis it rides on may take some getting used to, but I'm willing to bet you'll learn to like it — just like I did. 🚐

SPECIFICATIONS

PERFORMANCE

| | |
|--------------|-----------|
| Fuel Economy | 15.65 mpg |
| 0-60 mph | 15.4 sec. |
| 40-60 mph | 8.9 sec. |

CHASSIS

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Model | Ram ProMaster |
| Engine | 3.6L V-6 |
| SAE Horsepower | 280 hp @ 6,400 rpm |
| Torque | 260 lb.-ft @ 4,175 rpm |
| Transmission | 6-speed automatic |
| Axle Ratio | 3.86:1 |
| Front Tires | 225/75R16 |
| Rear Tires | 225/75R16 |
| Wheelbase | 159" |
| Brakes | 4-wheel disc with ABS |
| Suspension, f/r | MacPherson with stabilizer bar/solid axle with leaf springs |
| Fuel Cap. | 24 gal. |
| Warranty | 12 months/15,000 miles |

COACH

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Exterior Length | 24' |
| Exterior Width | 7' 6.5" |
| Exterior Height | 10' 4" |
| Interior Width | 7' 3" |
| Interior Height | 6' 7" |
| Construction | Aluminum framing, laminated fiberglass side walls, one-piece fiberglass roof, block foam insulation |
| Freshwater Cap. | 26 gal. |
| Black-Water Cap. | 32 gal. |
| Gray-Water Cap. | 40 gal. |
| Water Heater Cap. | Tankless on-demand |
| LP-gas Cap. | 13 gal. |
| Air Conditioner | 13,500 Btu |
| Furnace | 20,000 Btu |
| Refrigerator | 5.1 cu.-ft. |
| Converter / Charger | 45 amps |
| Battery | (1) 12-volt chassis, (1) 12-volt coach |
| A/C Generator | 2.8 kW gas |
| MSRP, base | \$89,268 |
| MSRP, as tested | \$91,844 |
| Warranty | 3-year/36,000 miles |

WET WEIGHT

(water & heater, fuel, LP-gas tank full; no supplies or passengers)

| | |
|------------|------------|
| Front Axle | 3,540 lbs. |
| Rear Axle | 4,640 lbs. |
| Total | 8,180 lbs. |

CHASSIS RATINGS

| | |
|-------------|---------------------|
| GAWR, F/R | 4,630 / 5,291 lbs. |
| GVWR / GCWR | 9,350 / 11,500 lbs. |
| OCCE | 1,170 lbs. |

| | |
|------|---|
| GAWR | gross axle weight rating |
| GVWR | gross vehicle weight rating |
| GCWR | gross combination weight rating |
| OCCE | occupant and cargo carrying capacity rating |

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Club SALE \$279.99 Reg. \$329.99

🚚 \$17 \$9 | ♥

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B

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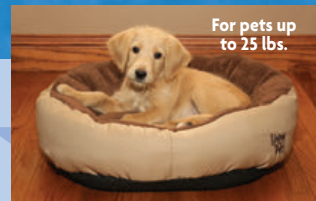
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\$29⁹⁹

Reg. \$34.99

Folding Pet Gate #74414

Three-section gate. Folds for storage under bed. | Ship Wt. 8 lbs.

51"W x 23"H extended



For pets up to 25 lbs.

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Club SALE \$249.99 Reg. \$284.99
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B 21 Quart #75219
Club SALE \$299.99 Reg. \$339.99
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White #74562 **Black (not shown) #75143**

Club SALE \$499 Reg. \$549 | Ship Wt. 14 lbs.



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\$21⁹⁹
Reg. \$24.99



A Dometic® 3 'N 1 Bowl Cleaner & Tank Treatment, 24-pack #74369
Combines air freshener, bowl cleaner and tank treatment all in one easy to use drop-in packet. Lavender scent. One 1.5 oz. packet treats a 40 gallon tank. | Ship Wt. 3 lbs.

12-pack #74368 (not shown) Club SALE \$11.29 Reg. \$13.29 | Ship Wt. 1 lb.

B Dometic® Premium Holding Tank Treatments
Offers the most powerful, longest-lasting control of tank odors without formaldehyde. Additives break down waste and help tanks rinse cleaner during pump-out. All-season use—won't break down in hot conditions. Concentrated—only 4 oz. liquid or one drop-in packet treats a 40 gallon blackwater waste tank.

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CAMPING WORLD

TOY HAULERS WITH PIZAZZ

The latest crop of specialty fifth-wheels takes the “roughing it” out of the RV experience for motorized vehicle enthusiasts

In the early 2000s, as towables with rear “garages” were becoming popular on the West Coast among those who enjoyed cavorting with motorized playthings in sand dunes, so-called toy haulers were utilitarian.

They’d have a rear ramp, and as often as not, were designed to carry sand rails and dirt bikes, with open space that extended well into the living area. Typically, they would have vinyl seating, rudimentary dining setups and sparse sleeping arrangements.

When done playing with sand buggies, motorcycles or four-wheelers, cleanup could be accomplished with a garden hose.

Oh, how things have changed.

While toy haulers of that variety remain popular in some quarters, new upscale toy haulers with a decidedly residential feel have emerged. The garage is still an important element, but these RVs now have high-end amenities that have become standard, such as leather furniture, solid-surface countertops, flatscreen TVs, hardwood cabinets and other swanky appointments.

In other words, they feel like a nice home.

“People today don’t want their toy hauler to be as edgy as it once might have been,” said Marlene Snyder, vice president of sales and marketing for KZRV, which builds the Inferno fifth-wheel toy hauler.

In particular, high-end fifth-wheel toy haulers, while offering amenities you might find at home, continue to provide the versatility that comes with having a garage. You can use it for storage space, an extra entertainment area, or even as a place to enjoy hobbies or run a mobile business. The uses of today’s upscale fifth-wheel toy haulers are almost endless.

“I use the word ‘versatility’ a lot because the garage can be anything — an extra bedroom, a den, a shop,” said Jim Rzepka, product manager for Keystone RV’s best-selling Raptor fifth-wheel toy hauler.

Marc Hauser, general manager of Grand Design RV, which has introduced the all-new Momentum fifth-wheel toy hauler, agrees. “It’s not just a box with four walls and a rear door that you can rinse out with a hose.”

Here’s a look at 10 higher-end fifth-wheel toy haulers for 2014.

Dutchmen Voltage »

► To haul toys or not to haul toys. That is the question for owners of Dutchmen’s upscale Voltage toy hauler series.

“About a third of our customers don’t even have ‘toys,’” said Nate Goldenberg, Voltage general manager. “There has been a shift in the market to older couples and families who want the convenience of having a garage for whatever reason, but also want a separate living area that’s more like their home.”

Indeed, Dutchmen offers a wide variety of Voltage layouts among its 15 8½-foot-wide floorplans that range in length from 35 to 44 feet and include island kitchens, electric fireplaces, residential sofas, quartz countertops and hardwood cabinets.

“It’s nice enough so that they don’t feel if they are getting a toy hauler — like they are taking a step down,” Goldenberg said.



With up to 160 gallons of onboard water, 70 gallons of fuel and an optional generator, Voltage owners can even “go off the grid” for days if they care to.

Garages range from 10 to 18 feet long, and with MSRPs that start at \$55,000, Voltage garage options include carpeted floors, Happijac electric drop-down beds, rollover sofas and a 2,000-pound winch with storage box.

Dutchmen 574-537-0600, www.dutchmen-rv.com

Forest River Vengeance »

► This toy hauler with a tough name actually has a soft side, with a lot of features that are uncommon even in luxury fifth-wheels. Designed to appeal to the chef in the family, the new 43-foot Forest River Vengeance features a striking kitchen with the stove situated in an Italianesque alcove and an L-shaped solid-surface countertop with pop-up electrical outlets.

An extension to the existing Forest River's Vengeance series, the Touring Edition, with MSRPs from \$69,900 to \$79,900, is available in four to six floorplans ranging from 37 to 43 feet. Each offers some variation of the innovative kitchen.

The laminated fiberglass 43-foot triple-slideout floorplan that debuted last December features a sleeping loft above the 12-foot garage that has a dedicated furnace, two convertible sofas and a drop-down queen bed. With a sliding glass door between the garage and the living area, which features a standard fireplace, high-end furniture and LED lighting throughout, the Vengeance Touring Edition feels more residential than earlier generations of toy haulers. "That was our intent," said Sean Ryan, Vengeance national sales manager. "We wanted to build a unit that, when you walk into the main entry door, you don't feel like you're walking into a toy hauler. We wanted to take the edge out."



Forest River RV www.forestriverinc.com/rv

Grand Design Momentum »

► The wide-body Momentum toy hauler from Grand Design RV is built on a drop frame to provide additional basement storage, while at the same time offering 12-foot garages in each of its three triple-slide floorplans — two 42-footers and one 39-foot. "Toy haulers no longer are a niche," said Marc Hauser, Grand Design general manager. "They've become a mainstream product because they have so much flexible space."

Borrowing some design features from its traditional Solitude fifth-wheel series, Grand Design has worked to make its 8-foot-5-inch-wide toy hauler offerings as versatile as possible, with the 42-foot Momentum 385 featuring a second bathroom in the garage along with a home theater system, refrigerator, game table and an optional dedicated air conditioner.

Each of the three current floorplans — and another 32-foot layout coming later this year — features a loft sleeping area over the garage.

In the living area, the Momentum has custom-embroidered chairs, solid-

surface countertops, stainless-steel sinks, solid cherry cabinet doors with hidden hinges, entertainment system with Bluetooth, oversize ovens, vessel bathroom sinks, LED puck lighting throughout and front walk-in closets that are prepped for a washer/dryer. MSRP: \$100,000.



Grand Design RV 574-825-8000, www.granddesignrv.com

PullRite



Super 5th

Standard Fifth Wheel

American Made Strength



SuperGlide

Automatic Slide

www.pullrite.com

Toy Haulers **With Pizazz**

Heartland Torque »

► Given the design parameters of the traditional toy hauler, with its rear garage and front living quarters, coming up with new ideas can be difficult. Yet Heartland RV raised a few eyebrows when it introduced its Torque 270HG floorplan, which turns the whole segment upside down, or at least backward.

The full-profile 8½-foot wide-body 30-footer, one of seven 30-to-43-foot fifth-wheels in the Torque series, has extra-large pass-through storage. The Torque series utilizes a flat floor that extends from the front cabover living room to a combination rear bedroom and garage area the company calls “Hidden Garage Technology.” The drop-down queen bedroom has its own side walls and carpeted floor and actually drops down on rails into the 10-foot garage to create

additional sleeping space.

Standard with tan fiberglass-on-aluminum side walls, the entire Torque lineup is equipped with Lauren Ashley furniture, stainless-steel appliances, Beauflor plank flooring, solid-surface countertops, heated-and-enclosed underbellies, and sleeps seven people.

The Torque 270HG retails in the mid-\$40,000 range.

Heartland 877-262-8032, www.heartlandrvs.com



PHOTOS BY SHAWN SPENCE

Jayco Seismic »

► Tall slideouts and curved interior walls make the 8-foot-5-inch-wide Seismic fifth-wheel toy hauler from Jayco feel larger than it actually is. Available in six floorplans ranging from 37 to 44 feet with garages ranging from 10- to 14-feet deep, the Seismic can sleep between eight and 11 people when optioned out.

“In terms of appointments, they all are high-end as a traditional fifth-wheel but they have the garage as a bonus,” said Kevin Combs, Jayco toy hauler product development manager.

Seismic’s flexible garages include standard opposing convertible sofas and electric beds that lift to the ceiling when not being used. “They are more of a patio or bunk room than they are a garage,” Combs said. Some models include island kitchens/bar areas with striking long-stem pendant lights.



High-end standard features include hand-held remotes that control awnings, slideouts, electric-powered jacks and patio lighting; generators, LED recessed lights, toe-kick recessed illumination, solid-surface countertops, stainless-steel sinks, 8-cubic-foot double-door refrigerators with high-gloss black inserts, residential-style cabinets and queen-size pillow-top mattresses. Base MSRP: \$69,857.

Jayco 800-RV-JAYCO, www.jayco.com

Keystone Raptor »

► Among the first high-end toy haulers to be introduced, the Keystone Raptor has undergone a lot of changes since its 2003 debut. “It’s become much more residential over the years,” said Jim Rzepka, Raptor product manager. “Everything has high-end appeal to it. Until an individual sees a ramp door in the rear, they might not even know it is a toy hauler.”

That means full-body paint is available these days — it wasn’t in the early 2000s — and the Raptor now is equipped standard with such amenities as residential refrigerators, three-burner ranges with stoves, Corian countertops and sink/range covers, maple raised-panel cabinet doors, king beds, three HD TVs, theater seating and fireplaces. One floorplan — the 415TS — even has his-and-hers sinks in the upper-deck master bedroom.



Raptor, with a \$60,000 base MSRP, features several bath-and-a-half floorplans and all have twin-bed lofts above the garage with access from inside the living area. Garages typically are equipped with opposing convertible electric sofas and drop-down electric beds. Options include a 5kW generator, dual-pane windows, and a rear patio system with rail and awning.

Keystone RV Co. 866-425-4369, www.keystonerv.com

KZ Inferno



► A loft over the garage to provide additional sleeping room or added storage is standard in KZRV's Inferno fifth-wheel toy hauler series, available for 2014 in lengths ranging from 35 to 44 feet with garages between 10- and 12-feet deep.

Crisp exterior graphics and a layered fiberglass front cap give the Inferno a distinctive look while being equipped to make RVers feel right at home. "With the Inferno, we purposely kept the more residential look rather than the 'motorhead-guy' look," said Marlene Snyder, vice president of sales and marketing.

That means the Inferno is equipped with residential-style furniture that includes a sleeper sofa, a large glass-door shower, three-burner range, 6-cubic-foot fridge, glazed overhead cabinet doors, Corian countertops and a Sony entertainment center. An optional Excursion Edition Package adds diamond plate on the side walls, dual electric beds in the garage, outside entertainment centers and rear screen walls.

Elsewhere, standard features include a 110-gallon freshwater tank, a 12-gallon DSI water heater, 15,000-Btu air conditioner, a Sony Xplod stereo system with DVD player and Dexter Nev-R-Adjust axles. Options include a 5.5kW gas generator and a porch package. Base MSRP: \$45,500

KZRV 866-472-5460, www.kz-rv.com

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Toy Haulers **With Pizazz**

New Horizons Majestic »

► Garages on the custom-built Majestic wide-body fifth-wheel from New Horizons RV are design options. “You tell us the size of garage you need and we’ll build it for you,” said Cole Brokenicky, design specialist for the family owned Junction City, Kansas, builder.

The 8-foot-5-inch-wide Majestic, available in lengths from 28 to 48 feet, is built on New Horizon’s own tubular-steel chassis with a cargo capacity of 5,000 pounds to facilitate full-time RVing, and includes heated-and-enclosed underbellies.

“We do have a set of standard floorplans, but if those don’t fit their needs we can start from scratch and design something the way they want it within some of our design standards,” Brokenicky said.

A 43-foot triple-slide with a 10-foot garage, for instance,



retails for a little more than \$186,000.

Available features include full-body paint, dual-pane frameless windows, LED lighting, vessel bathroom sinks, Corian countertops, breakfast bars built into island kitchens, Bigfoot automatic leveling systems, shaker-style solid wood cabinet doors, 50-inch LCD TVs on hinged storage doors, La-Z-Boy recliners and hand-scraped hickory floors.

New Horizons 800-235-3140, www.horizonsrv.com

Prime Time Spartan »

► You know the luxury toy hauler market is red-hot when a successful RV manufacturer launches a new toy hauler division just to keep up with demand. Already a popular manufacturer of travel trailers and fifth-wheels, Forest River’s Prime Time Manufacturing division recently jumped into the fray with the Spartan.

“Four floorplans are on paper right now, and we’ll probably add a fifth one to the lineup,” said Brian Weaver, product manager.

First out of the box is a 38-footer, with plans to go as big as 44 feet. With starting MSRPs of around \$70,000, the Spartan includes a host of amenities that include a colored fiberglass exterior, six-point leveling and E-Z Flex suspension, pass-through storage, Lane furniture, Denver mattresses,



solid-surface countertops, glazed cherry hardwood cabinet doors and drawers, dual awnings, rear patio railings and generator.

“Before building this product we dissected the market and saw that 99 percent of dealers and customers ordered toy haulers a certain way, so we made just about everything standard,” said Weaver.

Prime Time Mfg. 574-862-1025, www.primetimerv.com

SpaceCraft »

► If you want a toy hauler and have something special in mind, SpaceCraft Manufacturing will likely be able to build it for you.

The high-end custom manufacturer can build fifth-wheels in lengths from 26 to 53 feet, and has 50 floorplan templates from which to choose. Those include 5-foot-deep side-entry garages that don’t take up a lot of room but are suited for storing motorcycles and small toys.

And they’ll go big, as well as small. “Last year, we built a 53-footer for a semi that was a stacker that had two levels,” Marsha Trautman, president, said. “It carried a car and two motorcycles.”

As might be expected from a custom builder, SpaceCraft uses solid oak in its cabinet faces and raised panel doors throughout, and residential hide-a-bed sofas and recliners in



the living room, stainless-steel double kitchen sinks, deluxe three-burner ranges, Dometic 10-cubic-foot refrigerators, front and rear stabilizer jacks and two 31,000-Btu furnaces.

Because of the custom nature of SpaceCraft toy haulers, MSRPs vary, but a 40-foot-6-inch floorplan with 13-foot opposing living room slides, two 6-foot bedroom slides and a 10-foot garage starts at \$107,776. 🚐

SpaceCraft Mfg. 888-463-7520, www.spacecraftmfg.com

PHOTOS BY SHAWN SPENCE



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Fit for Prime Time

New Lacrosse Luxury Lite 318BHS travel trailer is designed for a variety of audiences

Roving with the entire clan in tow can be a challenge when it comes to making everybody happy. The campsites may be gorgeous, the meals delicious and the family and friend time fulfilling, but inevitably there is always the down time when it's up to Mom and Dad (or Grandma and Grandpa) to provide entertainment for everybody on board. Let's face it; times being what they are, "Go outside and explore or play with a stick" doesn't always seem to cut it for the generation of handheld gaming, smart phones and residential home-theater systems. That's when a trailer like the Prime Time Lacrosse truly shines, with floorplans designed to offer something for everyone, even if it's merely providing a "private" place for adventurers old and young.

The Lacrosse 318BHS offers no less than three distinct zones inside, and one out — and that's not even counting the surrounding campsite and/or recreational opportunities.

The front door of the dual-entry Lacrosse opens to the living area, with a not-too-impressive side view of the pillared entertainment center. Take a few steps into zone number one, however, and prepare to be impressed, as the enormous Max Slide Room in the living room, coupled with the 82-inch ceiling height, make for an incredibly open feeling. This configuration allows for a large 87-inch U-shape dinette, which boasts not one, but two, deep 12-by-19-inch drawers for storing pots and pans. And, claims Prime Time, the Max Slide Room offers owners 40 more cubic feet of living space than a traditional slide. The slide also houses the comfortable Lane residential sofa bed, which, as its description implies, is far more comfortable than most RV sleepers we have encountered.

Both seating areas offer a nice viewing area for the 32-inch LED TV, which is also enhanced by the requisite AM/FM/CD/DVD/MP3 stereo system. As part of the Touring Edition 4.0 Package (a so-called "mandatory option," or in other words, a standard

feature, \$1,450), owners also get an electric fireplace below the TV, which further helps transform the traditional living area into a cozier "den" like hideaway.

The galley area also benefits from the Max Slide Room, as the traffic flow through the heart of the 318BHS allows plenty of room for meal prep and cooking. The hardwood cherry cabinet doors and solid-surface countertops lend a high-end feeling, while the 8-cubic-foot refrigerator and oversized pantry and spice rack are nice features. There's also ample overhead and under-sink storage to swallow whatever doesn't fit in that cavernous pantry.

The lav in the Lacrosse truly fits the trailer, in that the Tough Guard vinyl flooring, large sink and tub/36-inch shower combo are all clearly intended for a tribe including little ones. And for the not-so-little ones, a skylight above the shower offers headroom for RVers up to 6 feet 4 inches tall, while a high-rise porcelain toilet offers residential comfort for all.



The Lacrosse's full-featured outdoor kitchen rivals many trailers' interior kitchens and truly allows owners to take the party outside in style. (Top) What the master bedroom lacks in frills it makes up for in privacy.



(Above from left) With the Max Slide Room deployed, the interior of the trailer feels wide open and breezy. The outdoor kitchen is enhanced by the bumper-mount grill hookups, meaning campsite cooks can orchestrate barbecue entrées and gourmet sides in one cooking area. The Max Slide Room contains the large U-shape dinette and comfortable sofa, both of which are great locations for viewing the 32-inch LED TV, plus the dinette houses dual 12-by-19-inch pots-and-pans drawers for super-handly storage.

The master bedroom area is rather Spartan, with a Select Foam queen mattress with underbed storage, dual shirt closets and dual windows, along with an overhead cabinet (featuring attractive etched glass in the doors) and an in-wall shelf unit highlighting zone number two. What changes these modest quarters into a regal retreat, however, is the use of pocket sliders on either side of the entertainment center rather than the traditional accordion door. Though it may not seem like much at first, this simple trick lends itself to a level of privacy not often found in a trailer that houses a bunk area (we'll get to that in a moment), and that small nod to the grown-ups may offer a modicum of peace when the crowd gets unruly.

And now, the star of the Lacrosse, and zone number three: the rear bunk area, complete with a mammoth 70-by-

73½-inch trifold sofa, which easily converts into a sleeping space for two or three. Above this sleeper is another bunk, while still another bunk unit lies across the aisle — all of which are cordoned off from the main trailer. A built-in bunk ladder makes bedding down a breeze, and the quilted bunk pads make sleeping through the night hassle-free for even the lightest-sleeping tots. Oh, and did we mention the super-cool "treasure chest" in the floor, perfect for keeping the area neat and tidy by storing toys while not in use? We truly had a blast with this little bit of flair that enchanted our test group of kids ranging in age from 2 to 10.

The trailer-design fun continues outside, as Prime Time delivers on its exterior kitchen compartment. And, this is no run-of-the mill sink and ice box; there's full power, running water, a small fridge and even a two-burner LP-gas stove, all centered around a solid-surface countertop with an absolutely

gorgeous stone veneer backdrop. Now, this is how you tailgate!

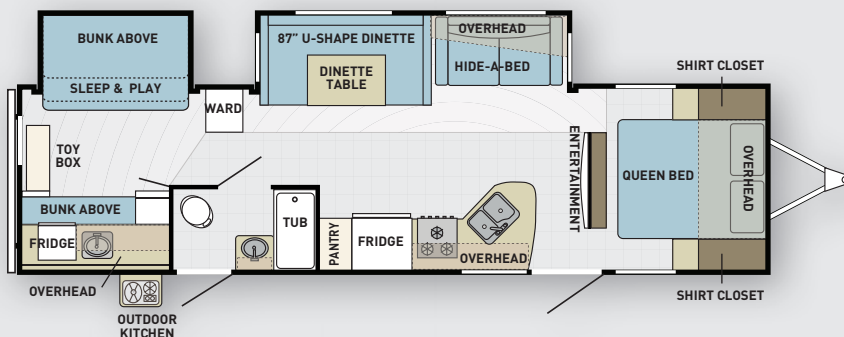
In addition to the aforementioned mandatory Towing Edition 4.0 Package that also includes a high-gloss fiberglass exterior, electric A-frame jack and LED interior lighting, buyers must also "opt" for the mandatory Advantage Package (\$4,350), featuring aluminum wheels, a universal docking center, an electric awning and electric stab jacks (to name but a few add-ons). The Lacrosse is also outfitted with the Thermal Package Plus, netting heated and enclosed underbellies, heated holding tanks and heated and enclosed dump valves. Regardless of your definition of "options," these features are wonderful add-ons to an already competent trailer package.

With three distinct "activity zones" inside and one out, we have found it difficult to overlook the Lacrosse 318BHS when it comes to shopping for a family trailer. We think you will, too. 🚐

QUICK INFO



| | |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Exterior Length | 35' 7" |
| Exterior Width | 8' |
| Interior Height | 6' 10" |
| Exterior Height | 11' 5" |
| Freshwater Cap. | 48 gal. |
| Black-/Gray-water Cap. | 30 gal./60 gal. |
| LP-gas Cap. | 14 gal. |
| UVW | 7,948 lbs. |
| Hitch Weight | 840 lbs. |
| GVWR | 9,640 lbs. |
| MSRP, base | \$33,640 |



Prime Time Manufacturing, 574-862-1025, www.primetimerv.com
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Get the LED Out

Replacing traditional bulbs with new technology leads to improved efficiency and longer light life

In recent years, the “green” movement has come on strong in the RVing industry. It only makes sense that a lifestyle that promotes communing with nature should advocate preserving the same. But going green can be achieved in many more ways than buying a fancy new trailer built only with composite materials. It also means making a change to more durable, longer-lasting appointments and technologies — and the easiest way to do this is by swapping out as many of the traditional incandescent/fluorescent/halogen bulbs in your RV as possible with LEDs. And if saving the Earth isn’t your thing (Tsk, tsk, tsk!), how about this: LEDs can last as much as up to 10-15 times as long as other bulb technologies (depending on conditions and bulb type) and they use less energy, which nets more savings in the long run. Now

that we have your attention, we should discuss the differences between LEDs and traditional lights and fixtures.

Traditional light bulbs generate light by passing current through a filament, which in turn heats the filament to a temperature resulting in a glowing, visible light. (Halogen lamps work in much the same way, but have a bit of the halogen gas added to cause a chemical reaction with the filament for improved brightness.) Fluorescent bulbs function by passing current through a mercury vapor, which emits ultraviolet light that is absorbed by a phosphor coating inside the bulb. LEDs, or light-emitting diodes, aren’t bulbs at all; an LED is actually a dual-lead semiconductor that emits light when current is applied. In layman’s terms, that means LEDs are far more efficient than their dated counterparts.

“Typical halogen lights that are used in the RV industry are either 10 or 20 watts,” said Mike Camarota, president of ITC RV, a company that offers interior lighting products for the RV industry. “In contrast, the LED equivalent lights are 4 or 6 watts. This reduction on energy consumption of 70 percent means less draw on the power circuit of the RV. A fifth-wheel may have 20 lights in a ceiling, which would equate to 400 watts using halogen lighting but is reduced to 120 watts using LED lighting. In dry-camping situations the battery will last longer.” But the benefits of LED technology go beyond power consumption. Ever notice how hot the interior of your trailer gets when all the lights are on? “Lights produce heat,” said Camarota. “The process of converting energy into light involves two byproducts, heat and light. The difference between LED lights

and non-LED lights is not that LED lights produce no heat but instead that they use less energy to produce light. In that conversion process, a greater percentage of energy goes into light emission than heat emission." The additional heat from a non-LED light source can mean extra cooling costs. Costs continue to escalate when you factor in replacement bulbs. And who among us enjoys changing light bulbs every few months [or storing them in your already precious cargo space, for that matter]?

Buyers must also be wary of false claims from bulb manufacturers. "The 'fake' part about ratings on incandescents is that the manufacturers have historically rated them in watts, which only tells about power consumption, not light output," said Jirah owner Tom Long. "[To dispel this], I always use the example of my wife's blow dryer. It has all kinds of watts, but not much light! That being said, I would estimate the standard 1141 (most common bulb on the planet) at about 225 lumens."

LED replacements are available in a variety of configurations, from entire fixtures to basic rewiring kits to straight swaps. We've gathered a number of products to help you go green, and to even save some green in the long run. Although many of these manufacturers also produce LEDs for tow and/or dinghy vehicles — as well as turn, signal and brakelights for the RV — we're saving these for another time in the interest of space.

Double Pancake Light



Diamond Group

▲ When you think RV lighting, your first thoughts are likely the double-pancake type lights found on the majority of RVs. Diamond has you covered with these eco-friendly, energy-saving 12-volt DC LED fixtures. The 36-diode daylight

white fixtures are surface-mount and easy to install, with just two wires. They draw a mere .22 amps and produce 350 lumens of light, and a three-way switch provides lighting from either side of the unit, or both. A bezel (sold separately) is also available to use this unit to cover square holes. Camping World price: \$52.99. Also available in a single-pancake model: \$26.24.

Another easy way to upgrade a trailer's standard lighting with eco-friendly, energy-saving 12-volt DC fixtures is the LED Light click-light. It features on/off click functionality, with no switch required. Nine diodes combine for an impressive 80-lumen output from a 3-inch light. Camping World price: \$24.86.

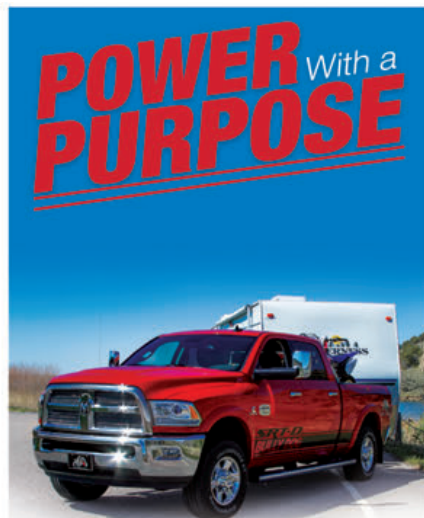
Wedge Replacement



▲ For replacing wedge-type lighting, Diamond offers a handy six-pack of LEDs for one-stop swapping. Each unit features 15 daylight white diodes capable of a 135-lumen output with a .073-amp draw. They are designed to replace a variety of bulbs recommended for overhead applications. Available at Camping World in a six-pack for \$89.99.

A quick swap of LED Replacements for an old traditional bayonet bulb will brighten up an interior in no time. The warm-white, 25-diode units produce 175 lumens with a .13 amp draw. Simple installation with big results. Camping World price: \$24.99

For the RVing bookworm, Diamond offers the Replacement LED Directional Reading Bulb. The bulb features a Single High Intensity LED chip for replacing No. 1383 standard bulbs. The warm-white output reaches 110 lumens while remaining cool to the touch. Camping World price: \$29.99.



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Get the LED Out

For a bit of eco-friendly retro chic, try a timeless 3-inch LED can light. The downward-facing light features frosted glass and is a great way to draw attention to an intended area. Spring mounting means no visible screws, and the 15 diodes rated for 100 lumens offer just the right amount of accent lighting. Camping World price: \$26.74

Diamond Group

800-456-4498, www.dg-usa.com

ITC RV

Looking for some versatile overhead lighting that looks great? ITC offers the 3-inch (No. 69231) and 4.5-inch (No. 69240) Radiance Overhead LED lights that offer a pleasing warm white light output. The units are installed using a patented twist lock that holds the glass in place for easy removal and replacement, and no visible screws. The 3-inch model is offered with six or nine LEDs

for an output of 110-160 lumens, while the 4.5-inch can be had with 12, 15 or 21 LEDs for respective outputs of 200, 260 and 340 lumens. MSRP: \$17-\$25.

Courtesy Light



▲ The Surface-Mount LED Courtesy Light (No. 69360ss) is a scant 5/8-inch deep for clean installation. The trim ring can be cut for a custom look, and in addition to the cool white LEDs, buyers can special-order blue LEDs for an even cooler look. The fixture is watertight, and the unit comes in polished stainless-steel and brushed stainless-steel finishes. MSRP: \$18-\$20.

The Compass Switched Swivel Undercabinet Light (No. 69410-xx) swivels 360 degrees for unlimited lighting options. The unit features a 50,000-hour estimated life and cool-to-the-touch operation. The LED can be installed using a screw or spring-clip, and it's available in nickel, chrome, truffle, black or white finishes, with an output of 86 lumens. MSRP: \$37-\$38.

The LED Exterior Porch Light (No. 69767) is capable of emitting 270 lumens of entry-illuminating, RV-key-finding brilliant light. The surface-mount design is ideal for patio applications, or for use as scare lights. The amber illumination is designed to reduce bug attraction, while an accent reveal allows for up-light functionality. Available in chrome, black or white finishes. MSRP: \$37-\$38.

For a simple LED swap, the Wedge Base LED Replacement Bulb (No. 69112b) uses a scant 1.5 watts and offers a direct replacement for wedge base types 912 and 921 bulbs. With a 50,000-hour estimated life and an output of 136 lumens, these LEDs should far outlive their three-year warranty. They are also dimmable using a compatible low-voltage LED switch (contact ITC for more details). MSRP: \$13-\$14.

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**Adjustable
Reading Light**

▲ The Compass Adjustable Reading Light (No. 69923S) offers 86 lumens of direct light sure to illuminate your favorite page-turner. The unit's flexible arm allows for unlimited light direction, and a 50,000-hour estimated life means the fixture will likely outlive the RV it's in! The screw-mount installation and attractive transitional styling give the light a classy appearance, and it only uses 2.17 watts while in operation. MSRP: \$40-\$50.

▼ For a unique LED accent that can also enhance safety, Illumagrip Assist Handles offer a step up that's available in straight or formed models. Both versions offer 20 inches of leg-up

**Illumagrip
Assist Handle**

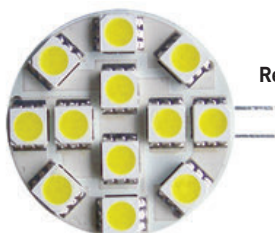


assistance rated at more than 400 pounds, and custom etching is also available. Either handle can be had with brushed or highly polished stainless-steel end caps, each of which features two mounting holes for additional sturdiness. The optional LEDs feature a quick-disconnect pigtail for easy replacement (not that it will be necessary given the life span of the LEDs). MSRP: \$80-\$160.

ITC RV Division, 574-389-8986, www.itc-us.com

Jirah

The Universal bayonet mount 1510-V64-R3 is reported to be brighter, stronger and smaller than most of the items available in today's RV LED market. Emitting 320 lumens of white light and built on a 15-volt DC platform, this quarter-sized LED upgrade is designed to replace standard bayonet-based bulbs like the Nos. 1141 and 1156. All LEDs feature the latest technologies to provide bright, reliable light output. "All Jirah products that incorporate Surface Mount Diodes (SMD) use the 5050 three-chip technology that gives the most light for the money," said Jirah owner, Tom Long. "They are non-polarity sensitive to eliminate the problems encountered so often with factory wiring." All diodes face outward, meaning no light is wasted when mounted in typical ceiling or pancake-style fixtures. Also available in a warmer color (1510-V45-R3) and wedge mounting base (1530-V64-R3: Cool white; 1530-V45-R3: Warm white). MSRP: \$19.95.



**Puck Light
Replacement**

▲ Puck-light (1240-S45-R3) replacements for the ceiling and under-cabinet puck lights use only one-sixth of the power and give a brighter, cleaner and cooler light than the standard 10-watt bulb. This upgrade slips right into the existing socket, so no removal or modification of the reflector is required. The contact legs are offset from the PC board, making installation as easy as changing a regular bulb. Solder joints are encased in shock-absorbing epoxy to offset the bumps in the road. There is a built-in bridge rectifier that ensures that polarity is correct. Output 275 lumens of warm white. MSRP: \$19.95.

If you're looking to replace old fluorescent tubes, a JC-42-FL LED

conversion kit is available. With ratings of 460 lumens per (18-inch) strip, these low-profile strips broadcast 20 percent more light with only a fraction of the power usage. Plus, they allow you to ditch the ballast, and no mercury is required for operation. The low-profile fit ensures the light is projected at a wider angle than most other replacements, giving more light in a larger area. Solder joints are encased in shock-absorbing epoxy. And they are all populated with the 5050 SMD three-chip technology. The kit includes everything needed to make all the connections (tools not included). MSRP: \$45/pair.

The flat-top (1230-S45-S3) replaces the 921-style bulbs and fits in the four-glass clamshell vanity fixtures found on higher-end coaches and trailers. The flat side allows all the LEDs to be attractively tucked behind the frosted glass of the clamshell. The replacement is brighter, cooler and lasts longer than the stock bulbs. The LEDs feature the 5050 SMD three-chip design, non-polarity and have a warm white glow. MSRP: \$19.95

Jirah, 909-297-1926, jirahled.com

Optonics

Experience instant LED light by simply tapping the lens of the UCL60CSNB 3-inch diameter surface mount LED light. This light is ideal for interior under cabinet and slideout applications. The sealed, waterproof unit is available in black nickel or black finishes, and is capable of outputting a brightness of 168 lumens. MSRP: 16.99.

Opti-Brite Light



▲ The Opti-Brite ILL36CB is a surface-mount LED interior light. The compact 2.75-by-5.75-inch size allows it to fit many applications, including ceiling mounts.

Get the **LED** Out

The unit's durable polycarbonate construction means it should last for many years, while its ¾-inch thickness yields a surprising 227 lumens. MSRP: \$11.99.

Another dome-light option is the Opti-Brite ILL22CB, a surface-mount LED interior light with or without an integrated switch. Its 1-inch thickness and 2.75-by-5.75-inch dimensions make it versatile for use in most vehicles. The unit is hard-wired with 6-inch leads, is waterproof and has an output of 810 lumens. MSRP: \$17.99.

The ILL70CSB Strip Lights are low-profile, sealed slimline units designed with interior undercabinet and storage applications in mind. The lights feature a wedge-based mount that projects light at a 45-degree angle, and are hard-wired with lead and ground wires. They are available in a polished-chrome or black housing, with or without a switch and are capable of an output of 171 lumens. MSRP: \$49.99.

The LL70CBAWN white LED strip

light for surface mounting pumps out 171 lumens of clean light. The strip is ideal for above-entry doors, as a scare light, a hitching light or a docking light. MSRP: \$35.99.

RVILL33



▲ The RVILL33 and RVILL34 are traditional interior pancake-style single and dual fixtures with an integrated switch. The single fixture features 11 LEDs (the dual-fixture, 22) that reduce energy requirements and heat output compared to the incandescent and/or halogen bulbs they replace. The single fixture is rated at 407 lumens, while the dual is 815 lumens. MSRP: \$6.99/\$13.49

The RVILL39 is an Aero Style Interior Light with style. The surface-mount ceiling light features a push-button switch and a replaceable white snap-on bezel, and an 18-gauge 6-inch lead and ground wire. Its oval shape and 230-lumen output make it ideal for many interior applications. MSRP: \$20.49.

Optronics

800-364-5483, www.optronicsinc.com

Single LED Replacement



Starlights

▲ For RV applications, the popular Brilliant Light series has several options. Among the most popular is the BL 3002, which is an Interior Single

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fixture with a 150-lumen LED bulb; the BL 3003 is an Interior Double fixture with two 150 lumen LED bulbs (\$41.99 approximate retail). They are modular/customizable fixtures that allow the customer to add any or all modules, which include a dimmer dial, night-light, day/night sensor and motion detector. The modules are approximately \$10.99 each retail. MSRP: \$26.99 (BL 3002), \$41.99 (BL 3003).

The water-resistant Revolution LED (No. 1141-200) offers 200 lumens of light ideal for porches or even interiors. Revolution units replace single-contact bayonet-style lights and fit most RV fixtures. The power range is 8-30 volts DC, and just 2.5 watts will run this LED, which Starlights claims will last 100 times longer than a standard bulb. Camping World price: \$20.99. Also available in a 250-lumen version (\$29.50) for brighter applications.

Enjoy the benefits of a bulb-type fixture with all the advantages of LED

lighting with the Revolution Replacement LED Vanity Bulb (No. 2099-270F). The LEDs are placed in a bulb housing to produce 270 lumens of soft, natural light for an RV's bathroom vanity fixture.

A direct LED replacement for incandescent vanity bulbs, it lasts 200 times longer and is 432 percent more energy efficient, according to the company. Camping World price: \$26.99.

Smart Light 2000



▲ Keep the campsite and surrounding area illuminated with the Smart Light 2000 Replacement outside round light. Available in white or black, the 12-volt DC unit features battery and

motion-sensor capabilities for added safety and security. It helps to prevent accidental slips, falls and theft by giving owners on-demand light wherever it's needed. The Smart Light installs easily using the same hole pattern as most standard lights. An amber lens kit for enhanced pest control is included. It can be used with all Starlights Revolution series 1141 LEDs. Camping World price: \$83.99. Also available in a more compact 1000 model (\$69.99).

For wedge-base applications, Starlights offers the Revolution 921-220 LED replacement bulb. The extremely bright polarity-sensitive unit produces 220 lumens of soft natural light, and lasts 100 times longer than the bulb it replaces, with a noticeably reduced energy consumption of .32 amps. Starlights claims these LEDs have a life expectancy of 60,000 hours. Camping World price: \$26.99.

Starlights, 800-883-5444
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DRIVELINE OVERHAUL



Proper maintenance, long before components are worn out, will keep the wheels turning

It seems like everything is getting bigger these days. Trailers and fifth-wheels are longer and have more slideouts. Pickup campers and Class C motorhomes are heavier. Engines are more powerful. But there is one critical part of the drivetrain, gas or diesel, which has not changed much for decades. It's amazing that all that weight being pulled and carried by all that power is essentially being transferred to the wheels by the driveshaft, U-joints and a spoonful of bearings, any one of which you could slip under your fingernail.

At the start of any travel season, or when plans call for racking up many miles of pre-planned journeys, one of the most important maintenance items that should not be neglected is a full inspection of the complete driveshaft system, in our case on a Ford F-550 4x4, but the procedure would be essentially the same for any make or model of truck, SUV or van.

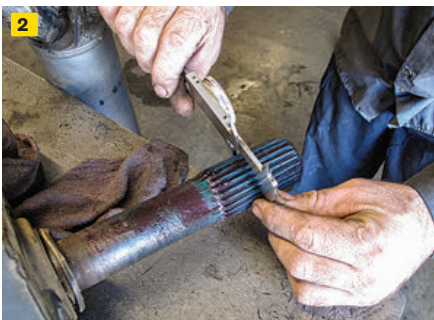
In case you haven't crawled under your tow vehicle lately, whether it's two- or four-wheel-drive, the driveline system is a fairly complicated piece of engineering that incorporates U-joints, slip joints and, usually, a carrier bearing, and if it's a four-wheel-drive, a constant velocity or CV joint, all

running on a thin layer of grease. All of these components work seamlessly together to provide the smooth transfer of power from the transmission and/or transfer case to differentials that in turn rotate the axles and wheels. As with all mechanical components, they're subject to wear, but since you can't see them, often the first sign of that wear is vibration. That vibration is often blamed on tires being out of balance. That same vibration can create transmission and differential problems if not corrected. It can also leave you wondering what the problem is after the tires are professionally balanced for the second time. If a U-joint or CV joint fails, you will know it right away because you'll be on the

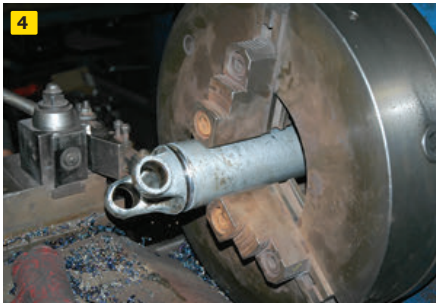
side of the road.

We visited Ken Imler Diesel Performance in Sacramento, California, where its reputation for doing things right the first time keeps customers coming back. One of the technicians quickly removed the front and rear driveshafts and sent them over to Drive Line Service of Sacramento. Periodically, and especially before a long adventure, we always take the driveshafts to Drive Line Service where the technicians meticulously inspect, rebuild and balance everything with quality Spicer components. A high-speed, precision Axline balancing machine developed by Drive Line Service is used to precisely align and balance all components. More than 100 shops around the country use the company's patented system.

Starting at the front, the splines on the stub shaft that slide into the slip yoke coming from the front differential were inspected. The inspection showed significant play in the splines because



1) These little needle bearings are what connect your vehicle's engine to the tires on the ground. 2) Time and miles had taken their toll on the stub shaft splines. 3) The blue glide coat on the new Spicer shafts extended farther up the splines for reduced wear.



4) The process of cutting off the worn driveshaft yokes and stub shafts was accomplished using a lathe. 5) Once the stub shaft was precisely aligned in the driveshaft, it was welded in place and rechecked. The goal was to keep a tolerance of .003 of an inch. We got ours down to .001. 6) As with other driveline components, rebuilding a CV joint is a job for an experienced technician.

the blue glide coating had worn off. A similar wear problem was found on the midship stub that mates with the rear driveshaft. The worn stub shafts were removed with a lathe and new ones pressed in, carefully aligned and welded in place. Holding a tolerance of 0.003 of an inch was the goal; ours was held to 0.001. It was apparent that the glide coat on the new Spicer shafts extended farther up the splines for reduced wear.

Moving to the other end of the front

driveshaft, (four-wheel-drive vehicles), attention was directed at the CV joint, a critical, but often neglected, component whose job is to allow a driveshaft to transmit power through a variable angle, at a constant rotational speed, without an appreciable increase in friction or play. After disassembly, there were signs that it had over oscillated on a really bad bump or dip. A CV kit was installed, replacing everything but the CV ball and the H-yoke. It was

important to make sure that all the needle bearings were correctly in place before putting the caps back on and hand turning it to make sure everything was rotating smoothly. The reason this important joint is often overlooked is because it's sometimes hidden above a skid plate. It does have a lube fitting that must be reached with a needle attachment on a lube gun. Lube guys in maintenance shops often don't want to hassle with it.

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DRIVELINE OVERHAUL



7) Inside the ball of the CV joint, the small needle bearings must be perfectly in place before reassembling. 8) Maintenance people often overlook the lube fitting on the CV joint. 9) To properly lube the CV joint, a needle attachment on the lube gun is required.

Removing the U-joints, we looked for uneven surface wear called “end galling” or “brinelling.” Brinelling is a process of wear in which similar marks are pressed into the surface of a moving part, such as bearings. The very small indentations can quickly lead to improper operation, like chattering or excess vibration, which in turn can accelerate other forms of wear, such as spalling and galling. In the case of U-joints, brinell marks will often be in

evenly spaced patterns along the races — rows of indented lines caused by the needle bearings digging into the surface of the caps.

To be safe, all the U-joints were replaced with new Spicer sealed units. Upon questioning the tech, realizing that older U-joints required lubrication at specified intervals, we were informed that the trend is moving toward a “greaseless society.” New technologies in seals have promoted this along with

the demand from the OEMs to provide more maintenance-free or extended-life products. The result is a stronger U-joint because it has not been compromised by cross drilling for the Zerk (lube) fitting. These new generation sealed joints are said to typically go 100,000 or 200,000 miles without a problem, even with diesel engines that develop higher torque.

Two of the yokes on the rear shaft were showing some wear so those were also removed and replaced using

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a process similar to that which was used on the stub shafts. In a driveshaft assembly, a cylindrical cardboard insert is often placed within a tubular shaft to dampen the noise generated during use. In many instances, the outer surface of the cardboard insert is provided with a solid bead of an elastomeric material that extends helically along the length of the tube. The solid helical bead is provided to engage the inner surface of the tube with an elastically developed force to prevent the damper insert from moving relative to the tube in service. As the tube transmits power, it can experience changes in its shape because of torsional and flexural loads. It has been found that engagement of the solid helical bead with the inner surface of the tube causes the insert to change its shape inside the driveshaft. As a result of this change of shape, the resonant frequency of the cardboard insert changes also, resulting in an undesirable reduction in its ability to dampen



10, 11) The carrier bearing supports the midship driveshaft where it joins the rear driveshaft with its splined stub shaft. It is bolted to a frame cross member. 12) A new dust boot protects the midship driveshaft splines where it mates with the rear driveshaft. 13) After pressing the new yokes into the shafts, the seam is welded and then rechecked for trueness.



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14) Any slight out-of-trueness is corrected with a quick blast from a torch. 15) Setting up the high-speed precision Axiline balancing machine developed by Drive Line Service of Sacramento is initially done with the experienced hand of the technician. He can feel the slightest vibration. 16) Small, flat washer-size weights are temporarily placed and moved to obtain the perfect balance. They are then welded into place.

noise and vibration. It also sometimes makes proper balancing more difficult. Consequently, the cardboard inserts placed by the factory were removed.

Installing all new U-joints looked very simple when done by an experienced technician. The new Spicer joints looked impressively bigger and stronger than the ones being replaced. Before final assembly, the flanges that bolt to the transfer case and the differentials were cleaned up for a smooth, tight fit and the “eyes” of the U-joint yokes were deburred. High-grade Spicer grease was used to prelube the slip tubes.

A new center support carrier bearing was pressed onto the splined stub shaft on the rear of the midship driveshaft making it ready to install on a cross member of the truck’s frame. The rubber dust boot was also in need of replacement.

Moving to the Axiline balancing machine, front, midship and rear shafts were balanced. The machine spins the shafts on a special mount that duplicates their function when in a vehicle at different speeds. It measures small vibrations and runout. Little flat washer-size weights are temporarily placed and moved accordingly and later welded on to obtain the perfect balance.

The final step was to bring the painted and assembled driveshafts back to Ken Imler Diesel Performance where everything was bolted in place. It’s possible to do this yourself, but use caution before you start. Several uncommon wrenches and sockets may be required depending on the vehicle. Often, the work is best done by experi-

enced professionals.

In an emergency, with a few simple tools, a failed U-joint can be replaced on the side of the road. It’s not fun, but if one fails anywhere close to nowhere, you have three choices: walk, call for a tow or fix it. (On some 4x4s, if a rear U-joint fails, the rear driveshaft can be removed and the vehicle can be driven in front-wheel-drive only to a place where repairs can be made.)

A good drivetrain maintenance regimen at the prescribed service intervals and/or before a major trip can prevent unexpected failure that can truly leave you stranded. 🚚

SOURCES

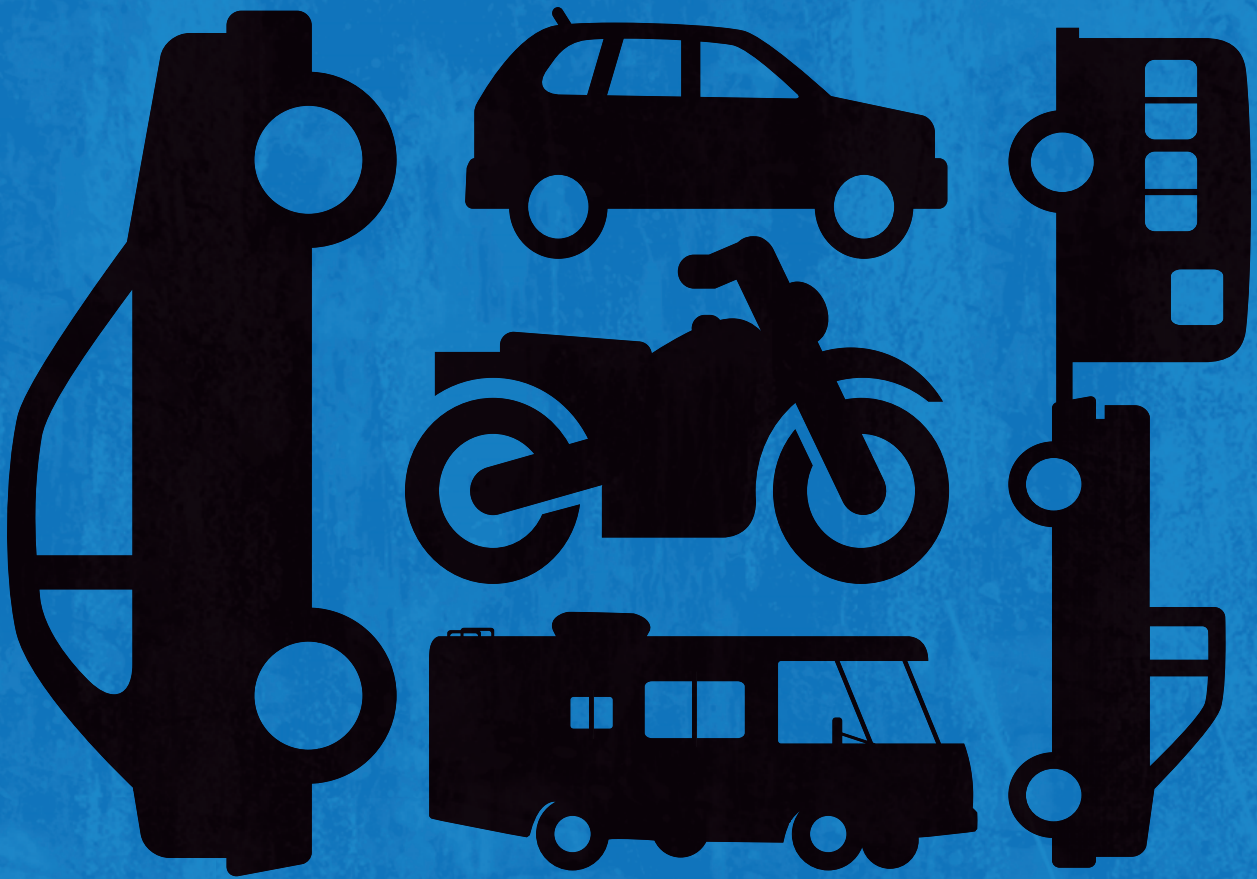
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17) Some of the special sockets and wrenches needed to remove or install driveshafts may not be in most toolboxes. Check before you start. 18) The simple U-joint could be the weak link in today’s powerful drivetrains. Have you checked yours? 19, 20) The expert mechanics at Ken Imler Diesel Performance installed the overhauled driveshafts and kept an eye out for any other problems.





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LIVELY ILLUMINATION

Dometic's 7-Color LED Light Strip installs easily, consumes very little energy and can be programmed to paint the patio with mood-changing hues

Stringing lights on an awning or outside an RV is a tradition many owners use to signify that everyone's settled in and it's time to kick back and enjoy the campsite. To some it means party time, but for all, stringing the old-style rope lights is cumbersome — and frustrating if a section fails to illuminate. A better solution is to use LED light strips, which not only eliminate the hassle of taking down and restringing for every trip, but offer exceptional location versatility, better light output, lower energy consumption and far greater durability, even with continuous use.

Dometic's 7-Color LED Light Strip takes outdoor lighting to a higher level by incorporating vibrant colors that can be programmed for multicolor or single color pulsing, or continuous illumination in any of the seven available colors. The speed in which the strip pulses can also be regulated via the wireless remote that controls all the programming options.

While the festive mood presented by the multiple color LEDs (white, blue, pink, red, yellow, green and cyan) is the primary reason for installing the 7-Color LED Light Strip, the solid white LEDs put out a surprising amount of

light, illuminating the area under the awning far better than a typical incandescent patio fixture.

Installation is pretty straightforward using common hand tools. Just about everything is provided in the kit except for the fasteners to secure the controller, silicone rubber and a few cable ties to clean up the wiring. For the evaluation, the light strip was positioned on an exposed section of the railing that contained the awning, immediately under the roller tube. When the awning is closed, the light strip is concealed, but it could be mounted lower on the side wall if the owner prefers not to extend the awning to make the lights visible.

Mounting versatility is the key; just about any surface can be used to attach the light strip, but keep in mind that sticking on the light strip in some locations might detract from the exterior aesthetics. Also, after the 3M-adhesive sets up, the light strip may be difficult to remove.

The light strip is powered by a 120-volt AC converter that needs to be plugged into an outlet that's within 30 feet of the light strip. What the instructions don't show you is that the converter output is 12-volt DC, so it's also possible to hardwire from the RV's



(Above left) Light strip colors allow the user to change the evening mood on demand. We preferred leaving the LEDs set to one color without pulsing. The white light provided generous illumination under the awning. No doubt these lights could be seen from afar and made it easy to find our RV after dark. (Above right) Dometic's 7-Color LED Light Strip Kit includes a 16-foot roll of LEDs molded into a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-wide strip that has an adhesive backing; there are 350 LEDs in the strip. A wireless remote, control box, 120-volt AC power converter, 30 feet of wire and an alcohol wipe are packed with the light strip.

house batteries by connecting positive and negative wires to the provided DC terminals on the controller as an alternative to using 120-volt AC power. The LEDs don't pull that much current, but using the 120-volt AC converter affords power options.

Once the light strip was installed, we had a lot of fun changing the mood under the awning. Admittedly, programming the lights to cycle through all the colors and to pulse may be a little much over long periods of time for some people, but that's the beauty of the wireless programming. We simply set the strip on the continuous-light mode to tone down the visual ambiance.

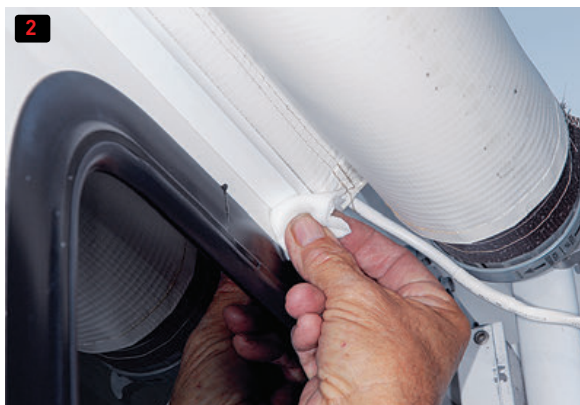
On a creative note, there are a number of other uses for colorful LED lighting, including providing visibility for guests looking for your trailer at night. This is especially useful when parking in a dispersed camping area like Quartzsite, Arizona, with other RVers. The LEDs can also be turned on while walking back to your RV after visiting with friends in the same park, and since the lighting can be controlled with the remote, they don't have to be turned on until needed.

Dometic's 7-Color LED Light Strip is designed to provide more than 30,000 hours of illumination and sells for \$199.99 at Camping World and other RV retailers. The company also offers kits with only white LEDs. Universal LED kits have one 39-inch light strip and a wireless remote control with dimmer features. Up to nine, 39-inch add-on light strips can be connected and trimmed to fit a number of applications. Common uses include adding light strips in storage compartments and under entry steps. Kits are available with 120-volt AC power sources or for direct connection to 12-volt DC sources (without the power converter). A Lateral Arm LED Light Kit includes four 39-inch light strips.

Adding the Dometic LED light strips to any RV is an easy two-hour DIY project. The LEDs are energy efficient and do a fabulous job of illuminating the area under the awning — and don't forget the fun factor. Here's how it's done:



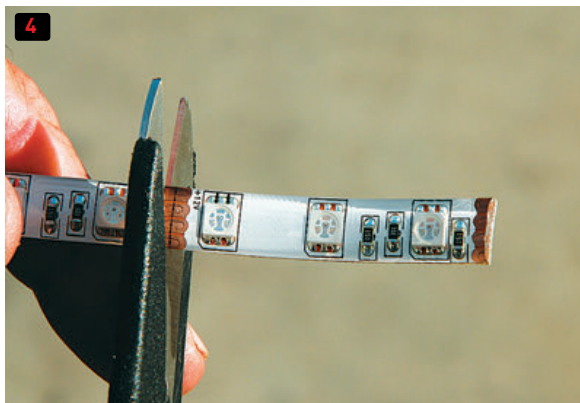
1) Before unrolling the LED light strip from the reel, the mounting location is determined and measured to make sure the 16-foot strip will fit properly. A connector is molded into the leading end of the light strip.



2) The railing that secures the patio awning to the side wall is prepped with an alcohol wipe to make sure that the surface is free of oils and debris that may prevent the adhesive from sticking properly.



3) Once the backing is removed from the light strip, it's simply attached to the awning railing, working with only a small section at a time to make sure the install is straight; a second person is very helpful for this step. The 3M adhesive is super strong, so care must be taken to make sure the fit is right the first time. The process goes very quickly.



4) Safe-cut lines are clearly visible so the light strip can be trimmed, if necessary, with scissors. Be certain here; cut sections of the light strip cannot be reattached.

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5) The terminal at the end of the light strip is connected to the wire cable that is routed to the control box. This end must be within 30 feet of the connector, which provides good mounting versatility. A nonconductive silicone caulking should be applied to the connector for weatherproofing; the LED strip is already waterproof.



6) Routing the wire cable is dependent on the controller mounting location and will likely be different for specific RVs. Here, the cable is routed above the awning roller tube and through a hole that was drilled into the side wall and exited in the back of an interior overhead compartment. Silicone rubber sealant must be used to weatherproof the hole after the wire is routed — a critical step.



7) Control box was mounted on the wall inside the cabinet that was in close proximity to the connector end of the light strip. Wire cable was connected to terminals in the controller. Wire ends are tagged for clear positioning and the ends are factory stripped and tinned with solder. Wire ends are simply inserted into the terminal strip and secured with an internal setscrew. Control box is not weatherproof and must be installed where it's protected from the elements.



8) Remote control has telescoping antenna for additional range of up to 125 feet. Buttons turn the lights on and off and control all functions, including the color of the LEDs, multicolor and single color pulsing and the speed of the pulsing. While the other kit components seem to be high quality, the remote is a little cheesy.



9) AC converter (with 12-volt DC output) plugs into adjacent power receptacle that happened to be in the cabinet where the controller was installed. Controller can alternatively be wired directly to 12-volt DC using the marked locations in the terminal strip.



10) Dometic also markets kits with white-only LEDs. One kit comes with four 39-inch lengths of strip lights and a wireless remote control with a dimmer feature. A universal kit has one 39-inch light strip, but up to nine add-on lengths of lighting can be connected. Each add-on kit has one 39-inch length of LEDs. Kits are available with the 120-volt AC converter or can be wired directly to the coach's 12-volt DC power source. 🚐

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An Energy Odyssey

EnerSys has expanded its ODYSSEY Performance Series product offerings to include the Group 65 battery designed specifically for consumer applications. The ODYSSEY Performance Series 65-760 battery features 762 cold cranking amps (CCA), 129 reserve capacity (RC) minutes and deep cycle capability up to 400 cycles at 80 percent depth of discharge. Engineered with Thin Plate Pure Lead (TPPL) technology, ODYSSEY Performance Series batteries deliver more overall power and longer service life than conventional batteries, according to the company. The batteries also feature a 3-10 year service life and are backed by a limited four-year full-replacement warranty.

MSRP: \$253.78

660-429-2165, www.odysseybattery.com

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EZ Oil Drain

Regular oil changes are an important part of RV ownership — but draining the oil can be a messy process, and if you're not careful, you can cross thread the drain hole when re-installing the plug. The EZ Oil Drain Valve simply replaces the existing oil drain plug for fast, clean and easy oil changes. No need for tools — just lift and turn the lever of the nickel-plated brass ball valve to drain the oil, then return the lever to its original locked position when finished. An optional fitting (sold separately) makes it easy to connect a hose to drain the oil into a remote receptacle, if desired. The EZ Oil Drain Valve is available in 26 sizes to suit all engines, according to the company.

MSRP: \$23.95

425-999-1200, www.ezoidrain.com

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Jack-E-Up

Every trailer needs an A-frame jack, but they can dent the tow vehicle's tailgate and can get damaged by dips in the road. They also make it awkward to step over the A-frame, and provide the opportunity for trailer theft. The Jack-E-Up solves all of these problems by allowing easy removal/reinstallation of the entire A-frame jack assembly. Simply unbolt and remove the A-frame jack, install the Jack-E-Up system in the existing bolt pattern, and re-install the jack; the Jack-E-Up receiver functions like a quick-disconnect system. Installation takes minutes, and the jack itself can be removed in seconds. Made in the USA out of powder-coated solid steel in black or gray.

MSRP: \$48

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The 2Way Air central inflation system by Rock Smasher Engineering allows simultaneous inflation/deflation of all tires on the tow rig and/or trailer to a pre-set pressure via one, patent-pending manifold and valve system. The core components consist of 3/8-inch polyurethane manifold tubing, which is routed to one custom-designed brass Schrader inflation valve at each corner of the vehicle. To inflate the vehicle's tires, simply attach the four quick-connect 1/4-inch whips to the tire's valve stems and the brass inflation valves, and inflate all tires at once using the manifold's central inflation point. Universal in application, the 2Way Air system uses all push-to-connect fittings and is available in a master kit for cars, trucks or duallys and single, double or triple axle trailers (triple axle pictured). Many options available.

MSRP: \$199.95 to \$299.95 702-981-6081, www.2wayair.com

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Hypertech Tuning Systems

Hypertech, one of the oldest names in aftermarket electronic performance tuning, makes products to improve performance and fuel economy for gasoline and diesel engines in cars and light trucks, and supplies many fleet customers. The company put its gasoline tuner products to the test at an EPA/CARB-recognized lab, Automotive Testing Laboratory in Mesa, Arizona. Diesel trucks were sent to another EPA/CARB-recognized lab that specializes in diesel testing, Olson Ecologic in Fullerton, California. The results from its EPA transient cycle testing proved a 9.73 percent increase in fuel efficiency with Hypertech's tuning.

Among Hypertech's top products is Max Energy Power Tuning, in both the Max Energy and E-CON programmers, which are designed to deliver more mileage at part-throttle and more power at wide-open throttle. In order to increase engine efficiency, horsepower and torque, Hypertech engineers optimize the timing and fuel curves point by point over the entire RPM band. With the added power, and optimized transmission functions, drivers use less fuel to accelerate and maintain cruising speeds, reducing torque converter unlocking and transmission downshifting to a lower gear. The Max Energy E-CON Economy Power Programmer is designed for drivers who want better fuel mileage and more power, but don't want to pay for other high-performance features they may not need. For an additional charge, the E-CON can later be upgraded to a Max Energy Power Programmer via the Internet to include all the Max Energy features available for a specific vehicle.

Max Energy Power Programmers

offer three stages of power tuning for diesels. Hypertech reports that even the highest power level, Stage 3, maintains safe exhaust gas temperatures (EGTs) while towing the maximum weight specified by the vehicle's manufacturer.

The Max Energy raises and lowers shift points in 100-RPM increments for peak performance and quicker acceleration. The units also increase automatic transmission shift firmness to maximize performance solo or when towing, to reduce clutch-pack slippage and transmission oil temperatures for longer transmission life.

If you get a "check engine" light or "service needed" message, Max Energy can read the code. After making the necessary corrections, the codes are cleared. Hypertech's Max Energy downloads and saves the stock tuning program, then uploads your customized Power Tuning program. The vehicles' computer can be returned to the factory programming before visiting a dealership for service. Max Energy can only be used on one vehicle at

a time, but if the vehicle is sold, it can be returned to stock tuning and the programmer used on another vehicle that is covered in the same part number. The Max Energy Power Programmer comes with a USB cable and a CD containing software to enable quick updates over the Internet.

Vehicle manufacturers limit a vehicle's top-speed to match the speed rating of the factory-installed tires. If tires with a different speed rating have been installed, the Max Energy vehicle's top-speed limiter can be raised or lowered to match the speed rating of the newly installed tires.

Additionally, Hypertech offers the Interceptor tuning device, which is designed for 2011 to 2014 Chrysler/Dodge/Jeep/Ram models with Hemi and 3.6-liter gas engines. In the Ram 5.7-liter Hemi, it's reported to add 33 horsepower and 40 lb-ft of torque. Interceptor is also available for 2007 to 2013 Toyota/Lexus light trucks and SUVs with 4.6-liter and 5.7-liter engines.

A number of accessories are available, including Air Charger and Power Charger, thermostats, ignition parts and fuel-pressure regulators. Last but not least, Hypertech offers performance "chips" for Pre-OBD2 vehicles from 1981 through 1995.

Contact Hypertech at 901-382-8888, www.hypertech.com.

Converting Algae to Crude Oil

The quest for a viable commercial process to convert algae to fuel for engines is closer to its goal, as engineers have developed a continuous chemical process that makes useful crude oil within minutes of pouring in harvested algae. After additional conventional refining, the algae-derived oil can be made into gasoline or diesel fuel.

Hypertech's Max Energy Power Programmer combines economy and power tuning programs. The upgradable E-CON version, which doesn't include high-performance features, may be discontinued soon, so those who want one should get it soon.



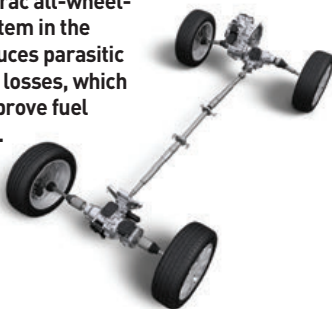
The Department of Energy's Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) method combines several steps into one continuous process that speeds the process and reduces costs. PNNL has reported that the Genifuel Corp. licensed the enabling process and is working on a pilot plant. Fuels derived from algae may allow the United States to be less dependant on foreign countries for vital fuel supplies.

New Powertrain Technology Improves Mileage

Advanced drivetrain technology is also being used to improve fuel economy. Jeep's 2014 Cherokee has a unique nine-speed automatic transmission that substantially improves fuel economy. Yet another component, the EcoTrac Disconnecting All Wheel Drive system by American Axle & Manufacturing (AAM), further boosts mileage. AAM claims the EcoTrac system offers a fuel-economy gain of up to 3 MPG.

EcoTrac is said to reduce parasitic drivetrain losses by 80 percent

The EcoTrac all-wheel-drive system in the Jeep reduces parasitic frictional losses, which helps improve fuel economy.



through disengagement of most of the components when all-wheel drive (AWD) is not needed. When AWD is needed to maintain traction, EcoTrac can begin driving the rear wheels in a half second, or faster if drive modes for slippery conditions are selected. EcoTrac also goes into a quicker-reaction mode when ambient temperatures are below freezing, or windshield wipers are on.

A two-speed EcoTrac with low range for off-road use is available in the Cherokee Trailhawk edition. EcoTrac was designed to work with bigger or smaller engines and drivetrains, and

may be used in other future Chrysler models, as well as vehicles from other automakers.

Robotic Refueling

The Husky Corp. and a Swedish company called Fuelmatics Systems have teamed up to introduce an automated fuel filling station. It could be the biggest change in how motorists buy fuel since self-service pumps and credit cards were introduced. The Fuelmatics Refueling System is said to work on cars, SUVs and light trucks with fuel fillers on either the right or left side, which is about 95 percent of all vehicles. The model FM 3003 has three nozzles, which can deliver gasoline, diesel and alternative fuels such as E-85 ethanol, natural gas or even hydrogen from the same unit. The only change needed is a special fuel cap, which will be an introductory gift to customers. The system is said to reduce the time needed for a fill-up by about 30 percent. For more information visit <http://fuelmatics.com/technology>. 🚗



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Going Keyless

RVLock's new integrated keypad adds another element of convenience to its direct replacement lock set for trailer entry doors

DIFFICULTY

1 2 3 4 5

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1 HOUR

TOOLS NEEDED

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Lock sets used on trailers, fifth-wheels and pickup campers are usually the minimum equipment needed to open and close the entry door, and provide the security of a handle lock and deadbolt. Adjusting these lock sets so that the door opens and closes without sticking can sometimes be difficult. In time, many doors simply won't close without prodding — or at least without fiddling with the handle so the latch bolt seats properly.

A few years ago, after dealing with a stubborn latch bolt, I replaced the factory lock set with an RVLock that motivated the door to close with a slight push of one finger. The original RVLock enabled deadbolt activation with the use of a wireless key fob. The next generation unit — which was later installed — had a remote keypad that could be located on the side wall of the RV and a key-operated lock in the handle (a feature dealers like because all factory handles can be locked/unlocked with pass keys).

In a move that seems like a natural evolution of the product, the company has integrated the keypad into the handle enclosure and beefed up the internal components. The latest RVLock V4.0 has the same footprint as the older versions, but the convenience of the built-in keypad eliminates the need to find a place to stick on a remote module—not to mention the improvement in aesthetics.

Installation is simple and even though we replaced a second generation RVLock, no modifications were



(Above from left) RVLock V4.0 fits into the existing hole vacated by the factory lock set. Widely spaced, backlit keyboard can be programmed from one to eight digits. System uses encryption technology to prevent someone from “lifting” radio frequency. The kit includes the lock set, one key fob, installation hardware and instructions.

made previously to the hole in the door, so we were able to make an apples-to-apples evaluation as if the original lock set was still in place. While hole dimensions should be close to universal among RV builders, we had to do a little trimming with a file to allow the new lock set to be seated without forcing it into place. That process only took a few minutes.

Once the outside piece is seated, the wiring pigtail is connected and the inside handle is fastened to the four threaded feet that extend through the door. The installer just has to make sure the inside handle cog and deadbolt knob line up in their respective places in the outside portion of the lock set.

The faceplate is then attached and the strike plate in the doorframe adjusted so the latch bolt functions smoothly and the

door is snug against the seal after repetitive testing.

After confirming that the handle and deadbolt worked properly, the battery compartment was unscrewed and four AA batteries installed. The keypad is preprogrammed for a 1, 2, 3, 4 sequence. We suggest you change the code immediately.

Syncing of the key fob that came with the lock set takes only a few minutes; up to 10 can be synced and additional key fobs can be purchased for \$39.99 each. Factory instructions are easy to follow and the steps are confirmed by audible signals. If a mistake is made or the allocated programming



LOCK SET UPGRADE » Deadbolt is activated using private code or wireless key fob. Keys manually operate handle and deadbolt.

window times out, the process can be started again by pushing a recessed “learn” button. A few easy steps are followed for keypad coding, which can handle up to eight digits, but requires at least one.

Make sure the hard keys to the lock set are accessible outside the RV during programming — just in case. It’s also a good idea to hide a key somewhere outside the rig so it’s available in the event of a battery failure down the road. Batteries should last five to six months and there’s a switch to deactivate the key fob(s), which will conserve energy (keypad will still be active). It’s best to remove the batteries during prolonged storage.

The RVLock Keyless sells for \$239, which may seem a little pricey until you experience the convenience — especially if you’re prone to losing keys — and pleasure of opening and closing the door with little effort. 🚚

RVLock Keyless

888-316-9899, www.rvlock.com



(1) File was used to open the hole in the door slightly to make room for the RVLock. (2) Once the outside handle is in position, the wire harness is connected; an extra hand will be helpful here. (3) Four AA batteries are placed in holder after the cover, held in place with two screws, is removed. Red lever sets the deadbolt from the inside. (4) Radio is turned off using switch on the inside handle housing, which deactivates the key fob(s) but not the keyboard. Reset button above switch restores default code.

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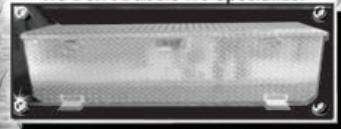
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ADVICE FROM OUR TECH TEAM

TIRE SPIN

Q I have a 2008 Ford F-250 Super Duty with a 6.4-liter turbodiesel. I pull a 1998 Jayco Designer Model 3260. When I start from a stop condition and I give it too much acceleration, the rear wheels will spin. What could be causing this?

John C. Thomas, Greenfield, Indiana

A We've had this happen to us many times with different vehicles, John. First, your diesel has a heap of torque and power and starting out that power can spin the rear wheels, especially on limited-traction surfaces such as wet pavement or gravel. It's also possible that your weight-distributing hitch spring bars may be adjusted a bit too tight, which transfers more weight from the rear axle to the front axle. This reduced rear-end weight also reduces traction and increases the chances you'll spin the tires. Readjust your WD spring bars and watch that throttle foot and you should experience fewer burnouts. — **Jeff Johnston**



DODGE TOW RATING BOOST

Q I have a 1500 Dodge Ram, 5.7-liter Hemi, 4x4 automatic, 3.92 gears, 20-inch tires, with tow package. My Dodge dealer told me it can only tow 4,500 pounds because of the 20-inch tires. Could you give me some advice about how to raise the tow rating? The truck has only 46,000 miles on it.

Jerry Fuller, Silverdale, Pennsylvania

A You didn't say which year or cab style you own, but given the mileage, we'd guess it's a late model and as such, should be rated to tow between

about 8,500 and 9,200 pounds. You also didn't mention whether you have the factory optional 20-inch wheel/tire or an aftermarket package, but if your dealer said the reduced tow rating was due to the 20-inch tires and wheels, Jerry, it was because those low-profile tires aren't rated to carry as much weight as a 16- or 17-inch tire/wheel. Compare the tow rating of an identical truck with the standard wheels/tires, and you should get an idea of the disparity (tow guides for various years are available on www.trailerlife.com). It would be fairly costly, but you could

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.

replace your Ram's 20-inch tires and wheels with a type that has a higher tire rating, such as an LT-rated tire on steel or aluminum wheels. That could help bump up your Ram's tow rating. — J.J.

BATTERY COMPARTMENT STRESS

Q I recently bought a 2005 Dutchmen Kodiak travel trailer from Camping World that has the battery located in a storage compartment instead of on the A-frame of the trailer. It's very difficult to remove a heavy battery so I can keep it on a trickle charger at home when the trailer is in storage. I am 71 years old and it takes all the strength I have, to say nothing of the pressure on my back while in a crouched position, to remove and replace the battery. I believe this is a poor design and certainly is not user-friendly. This is the 10th trailer I have owned since I started camping in 1976, and the previous nine had the battery located conveniently on the A-frame.

I cannot understand the concept of this design so I contacted Dutchmen Industries and asked if its engineers had any solution. I was told the engineers who designed this unit are no longer with the company. I believe it would be very expensive to transfer the battery to the A-frame and reroute all the wiring. I'm wondering if a small solar panel mounted temporarily on the A-frame with wires fed through the compartment door and attached to the battery would be a possible solution.

Dan Sansone, Tavares, Florida

A It's impossible to figure out why RV manufacturers make some of the decisions they do, although it usually comes down to saving cost and making money. Placing the battery in an enclosed body compartment is a viable design element, although, as you've found, it's not convenient for battery removal or replacement. If you have space available on the A-frame you may find it's not as costly as you think to relocate the battery. You'll need a welded or bolt-on battery rack, a battery box for each battery and new wiring, so it's not that difficult of a project. Be sure to

use a heavy-duty circuit breaker at the battery to protect the positive power line from short-circuit damage.

Because you live in a warm climate, you needn't worry much about battery damage in storage due to freezing. If keeping the battery charged by way of a trickle charger is your plan, then yes, a modest-size solar panel could do the job. Be sure to disconnect the battery from the trailer's power circuit when in storage mode so the charger isn't fighting any onboard parasitic draws. Don't mess with those tiny 12- or 14-inch solar panels designed to mount on an air conditioner or tight places. Go for something a bit larger to ensure there will be adequate charging power available. In addition, use a charge controller that includes a "smart charge" circuit that automatically drops to a trickle maintenance rate once the battery is topped up. Mounting the panel on the roof may be a better idea from the standpoint of security and theft deterrence. As with a battery relocation to

the A-frame, this effort will cost a few dollars but you'll be nicely set up for the long run when it's done. For complete information about charging systems, visit www.amsolar.com. — J.J.

LP-CYLINDER CERTIFICATION

Q My RV's 30-pound LP-gas tanks are stamped 2000 and are out of the manufacturer's 12-year certification. I've heard of recertification periods of five, seven and 12 years based on the type of inspection or test performed. Can you explain the different recertifications? Will the old OPD valves have to be replaced at that time if they are in good shape? If the tank is in good shape, am I better off recertifying the old tanks or purchasing refurbished ones?

Bryan Berlin, Tucson, Arizona

A An LP-gas cylinder needs to be recertified when it's 12 years old, then every five years after that. You don't need to automatically replace

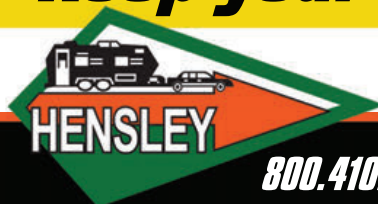
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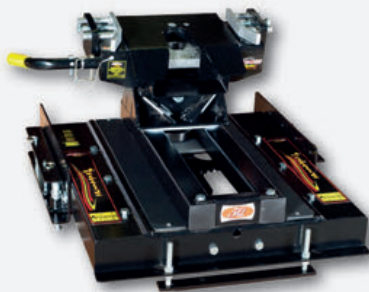


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the OPD valve during recertification. The process is fairly simple and is an inspection to be sure the parts are all in good condition. As long as the cylinder and valve are in good shape, the cylinder will be stamped with a recertification date and you'll be good to go. — J.J.

WEIGHING YOUR RV

Q After reading your magazine for the past few years, I have found several articles that indicate the importance of monitoring the weight of an RV. Loaded weight, side-to-side weight and weight-per-wheel are of concern. But I have not seen an article that references where, in each state, there are facilities that are set up to do this. There are truck scales that can be found along the interstate highways, but are they actually set up to service the occasional recreational vehicle traveler?

Robert Dunn, Union, Washington

A Some state-operated weigh stations will accept RVers on a time-available basis. That is, if they are not busy with commercial vehicles, they shouldn't mind weighing your rig if you explain that you are interested in making sure the RV's weight and loading is within safe limits. However, there are many "civilian" scales at truck stops, recycling centers, moving and storage facilities, quarries, lumber yards, etc. These scales, in addition to providing weight figures, are also revenue sources for their operators, so most are more than happy to have RVers come by for a checkup.

Simply entering "public scales" and the name of your city in Google will usually result in one or more places to weigh your rig. Ask for pricing and best times to go there, too. — **Ken Freund**

EXPEDITION OVERLOADS?

Q When I hook my KZ 30-foot trailer to my 2011 Ford Expedition, the rear of the Expedition stays about 1½ inches down from level. This is while using a weight-distributing hitch. I sometimes get brights flashed at me at night when

the oncoming car thinks the brights are on. I cannot find any overload shocks for an Expedition; maybe this is due to the independent rear suspension. Are there any overload shocks to use on a stock, short wheelbase 2011 Expedition?

Ron W., Clovis, California

A If a Web search turns up no overload shock options, Ron, it could be for a good reason. Ford may not approve of using its shock absorber mounts as load-bearing points, which would rule out overload shocks. Most shock absorber mounts are designed to handle the compression and extension loads induced by the shocks as they work to damp out suspension movement, and those loads are nowhere near as serious as the loads imposed on suspension components that support the weight of the vehicle.

That being said, have you taken the time to determine the hitch weight of your rig? If it's sagging excessively, your trailer could be too heavy and/or have too much hitch weight. Weighing your tow vehicle and trailer on a certified scale should be your first step before making any major changes. It could also be that your WD hitch is not adjusted properly. Many people make the mistake of not setting the spring bars as tight as they should be, and that results in the back of the tow vehicle sinking lower under the hitch weight than it should. Try tightening up the spring bars — drop another link in the hanger chains, for example — and see if that helps. You may also need to adjust the head angle to avoid having the spring bar chains become too short. — **J.J.**

AEROLITE TOWING

Q We purchased a 2013 Dutchmen Aerolite model 294RKSS, 33-foot travel trailer. The trailer's unloaded vehicle weight (uvw) is 6,342 pounds and its gross vehicle weight rating (gvwr) is 7,600 pounds. Our tow vehicle is a 2011 Toyota Tundra with the 4.6-liter V-8 with factory BF Goodrich P275/65R18 tires. On our first trip we weighed it: The front axle is 3,000 pounds, the rear axle is 4,140 pounds,

and the trailer axles are 5,980 pounds, overall is 13,120 pounds.

The setup is equipped with an Eaz-Lift WD hitch and sway control. At the trailer dealer I was assured it was safe but I am skeptical and need some reassurance because I'm new at this. Do I have enough truck? The tires have 22,000 miles on them and are in good condition. Are they safe?

Emilio Barrero, San Antonio, Texas

A You left a lot of details out of your Tundra specifications, Emilio, such as cab style, 2WD or 4WD, and so forth, so we can't pin down the exact tow rating. Equipped with a factory towing package, your truck can be rated to tow as much as 8,500 pounds. But that, again, depends on factors we don't know. If you do a Web search on "2011 Tundra tow rating" you should be able to find the exact figure for your truck. In general, it seems like your setup is pretty solid.

If the tires are the ones that came from the factory then they're part of the chassis package and therefore part of the towing equation. Check the load ratings molded in the tire sidewalls, add them up. As long as the tires meet or exceed the front and rear axle ratings, then they're OK for the towing. Just be careful not to overload the truck with mounds of extra cargo in the bed and trailer. — J.J.

WEIGH SCALE PUZZLEMENT

Q In reference to Don Frank's question in the December 2013 issue, this weighing-related question has been answered before in the same manner and I do not understand it.

We normally use Flying J or Pilot and they have CAT scales that are split scales with multiple platforms for measuring several weights at once. You put the truck front axle on the forward scale while ensuring that the back axle is on the second scale and the trailer axles on the third part of the scale. You receive a ticket with three weights on it. Then go drop the trailer and return to weigh the truck on the split scale for two weights. There is no need to park

any axle off of the scale.

Surely other truck stops have similar scales. Take advantage of the split scales; it makes weighing so much easier.

Ron and Nancy Vanderhoof, Via email

A Your points about using the multi-platform scale are valid, Ron, but not all scales are that type. Many are still single-platform, one-at-a-time scales, and that's probably the type that's most convenient for Frank to use. On occasion we suggest positioning the tires on one side of the RV off the scale, which leaves the other tires on the scale, then you move over and weigh the tires on the other side. This enables you to get figures for each side of the RV in addition to the overall or axle weights. The side-weighing procedure is helpful when you suspect there may be a weight imbalance that's causing handling, tire wear or other problems. — J.J.

GOOSENECK HITCHES

Q Last year I got my first fifth-wheel trailer, and what a revelation! I chose a gooseneck hitch since my truck has a day job. I also realized I don't know anyone who uses a conventional fifth-wheel hitch. Admittedly, these are mostly agricultural types who pull stock trailers. I can confirm the ease of conversion, lower cost, less weight and the gooseneck allows greater articulation when on uneven ground. People I spoke with who had both types say the gooseneck reduces fore and aft motion and provides a smoother ride. Personally, I don't find hitching up any more difficult than with a conventional travel trailer. What are the advantages of the conventional fifth-wheel hitch? I can't seem to get an unbiased opinion.

**Phil Blackshear
Albuquerque, New Mexico**

A Similar discussions have been going on for years and are sure to continue. Based on my unscientific observations, gooseneck trailers and hitches are somewhat of a regional preference, being more widely used

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and popular in the West than in the Eastern part of the United States. I agree that they leave much more room in the truck bed and are more convenient to remove when not needed than a fifth-wheel hitch. However, some owners state that the gooseneck deliver a harder ride than conventional fifth-wheel hitches and, of course, air-ride counterparts are also available to further smooth the ride.

The supports and braces on a gooseneck trailer's neck are often stronger than those on a fifth-wheel trailer frame. Changing a fifth-wheel to a gooseneck hitch may create stresses that a fifth-wheel frame was not designed for. There are a few RV trailers that are available with gooseneck hitches. However, if you're planning to convert an existing trailer, contact the manufacturer's engineering department

before making the modification. There are a number of gooseneck coupler conversion kits available, including the ones by www.Popuphitch.com featured on page 65 of the February issue. — **K.F.**

CARRIAGE PARTS CONUNDRUM

In regard to your *RV Clinic* column in the February issue on page 78, the letter titled "Carriage Parts?": I own a Carriage as well and I've found several great suppliers of the proprietary parts mentioned in the response. I joined the Carriage group on Yahoo! a few years ago and the members have a wealth of information. There are more than 2,000 members. I suggest that Gillermo Garza become a member of one or both of the sites listed below. It's free and it will be well worth his time. Both have searchable indexes and if the subject he's searching is not there then he can put in a query.

Here's the link: http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Carriage_RV/info.

Also, here's another great site. I've noticed that there are a lot of the same people on both: www.carriage-lifestyle-owners.com/portal.php.

Jay Amundson, Las Vegas, Nevada

MORE CARRIAGE PARTS

Regarding Gillermo Garza's question about Carriage parts, he can get most of the parts through a Lifestyle dealer because the trailers are almost identical. Some of the people from Carriage work for Lifestyle and they would be able to direct you.

**George Snyder
McAlisterville, Pennsylvania**

A Thank you for the leads, George and Jay. Carriage was a popular brand for many years and I'm sure we have readers who will benefit from this parts-chasing information. — **J.J.**

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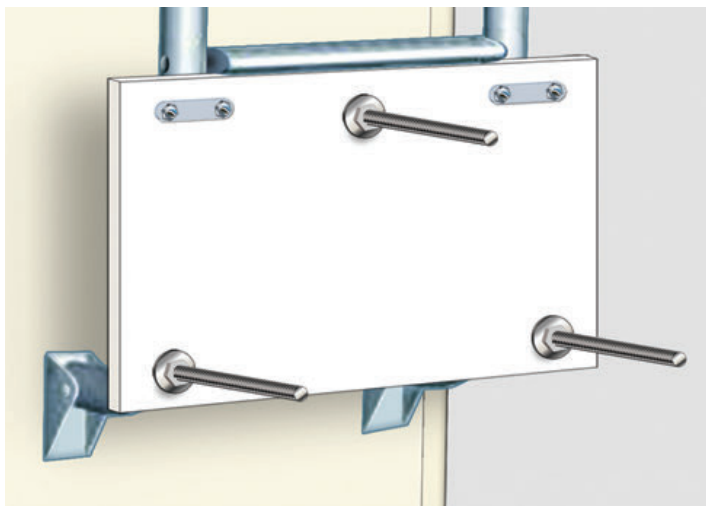
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This is only an outline of the plan's features. Please read your Plan Description carefully to understand all the services available to you, as well as any terms, conditions and limitations. GTA29232 TL 0114

Wind It Up

As I get older, the 50-amp electrical cord gets heavier, and with the cold weather, it also gets harder to coil. Using a piece of scrap plywood, three 6-inch bolts, three nuts, three washers, two 1-inch U-bolts and some flexible tubing, I made a permanent attachment to my RV's ladder. I can now wind the electrical cord into a small coil with an inside diameter of 13 inches and an outside diameter of 20 inches. The bolts are fastened to the plywood so that the space between the bolts is 11½ inches. Flexible tubing is slid over the bolt threads so they do not cut the electrical cord. After winding, the coil can be removed and is now small enough to place in a compartment in the RV.

Mike Villa, St. George, Utah



Fastidious About Funnels

I got tired of having an assortment of funnels lying around everywhere and getting dirty. I took a 5-gallon plastic pail and cut various size holes in the lid for funnels to drain into the pail. I then cover the funnels with a plastic trash bag and the funnels stay clean and dry for the next use.

John Siefker, Saline, Michigan

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

QUICK FIX

Trailer Connector Corrosion Tip

This is in response to "Trailer Connector Corrosion" in *RV Clinic* in the September 2013 issue. I made two improvements that work so well that I've never had to clean contacts in more than 20 years since I came up with this fix, despite upstate New York's weather. Even now the plug and receptacle look like new.

On the trailer end, I use a tethered plug cover, which I got at Camping World many years ago; it's similar to the one by Fastway (www.fastwaytrailer.com). The plug has to be stored in such a way that water won't run down the cord and collect inside the cover. I mounted a spring-type broom clamp to the back of the angle iron support for the battery box so it's a simple push-on to hold the plug in its stored position.

On the tow vehicle end, I found a pipe-end protector or cap made of orange plastic that's used to protect pipe and tubing ends during shipping. The manufacturer is Caplugs (888-227-5847, if you can't find one locally). It has a ⅛-inch lip that needs to be trimmed. It will slide inside the 7-pin receptacle perfectly, keeping the contacts clean.

Chuck Lewis, Oneida, New York 🚐

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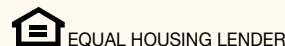
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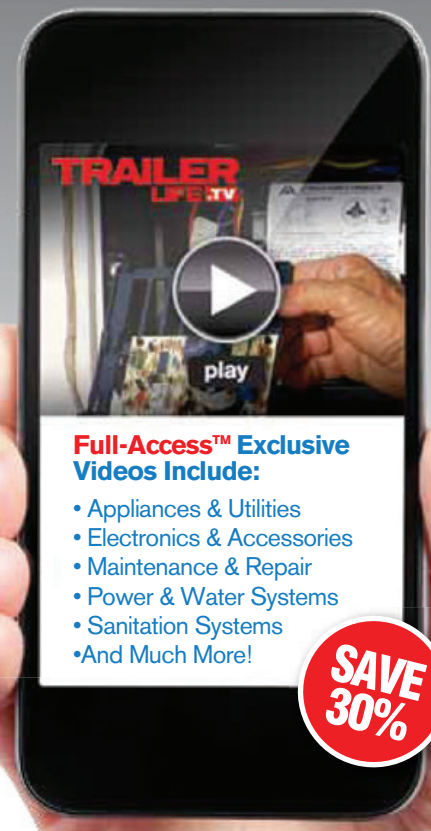
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Appalachian Antiques

Taking a walk down memory lane in Clinton, Tennessee



East Tennessee is part of Appalachia. It has the soft peaks and broad, river valleys of the Appalachian Mountains that run up the East Coast. It's the home of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the country-music metropolis of Knoxville. Here, too, is "the secret city" of Oak Ridge, where the nuclear material was secretly produced for the

two atomic bombs that ended World War II.

The roots of the homegrown folks run deep into Appalachia. I suspect many can tell stories of their early kin, their struggles with poverty, of life and death in the coal mines, of clan feuding and makin' moonshine.

Remnants of those days are found in antique shops all over eastern Tennessee. But nowhere are antiques and collectibles bought and sold with more frequency than in Clinton, population less than 10,000. It has 25 antique stores — more than any town this size that I've been in.

I normally don't go into antique stores, but in Clinton, it's what you do. I discovered they were selling as antiques things that were in my life when I was a kid. I watched a couple happily paying good money for a corrugated washboard. I remember when my grandmother appeared equally happy when she tossed hers in the trash, the day she realized her new washing machine had replaced it.

Then again, this is bluegrass country, where music is often made with a washboard in the mix. That couple may have been famous musicians, who I would have recognized, if only their world of music connected with mine.

Most of the antique stores are on Market Street. Two days a year, in May and October, the town closes the street to cars. Shop owners move merchandise out under canopies on the sidewalk, and they have an antique festival that goes all day.

Walking up Market Street, I was intrigued by a neon sign in a store window that said "Marvel Comics." Inside, it looked like a shipping room where only someone who had

Most of the 25 antique shops in this riverfront town cluster on or around Market Street. Each offers aged pieces of Americana, most of it from the heart of Appalachia.



worked there a long time could find things.

Steve Jennings, the owner, was at a desk facing the door. He was wearing steel-rimmed glasses on his forehead. The desk was covered with papers, boxes and an open checkbook. He obviously had plenty going on. Being a Southern gentleman, he made me feel that, since I was there, everything could wait.

Steve has been selling comics and action toys here — new as well as collectibles — for more than 30 years. He works six days a week. "Most of my business is walk in," he said. "Lots of kids. Families drive up here from Knoxville, shop and stay the night. And folks bring in collections, which I buy. Always ask questions though. Occasionally, someone tries to sell me stolen stuff. I can tell. And I don't want it."

"Ever sell on eBay?" I asked.

"Not now. I've got a thousand pieces waiting to be priced. I've been here since '83, ya know," he said, as if rationalizing work that he had been neglecting for a good while. He has an inventory of more than 300,000 comics with 80 to 100 new ones coming in every Wednesday.

What he calls "showcase comics" can go for as much as \$80 to \$100 a copy. A more typical collectible would be a John Wayne comic for \$30.

"No one has the back issues like we do," he said.

I didn't ask to see any. I should have. I missed a chance to look back into a world, an earlier time, to which I am still connected.

Welcome to America's Outback. 🚚

PHOTO BY GLEN GALEN

PHOTO BY BILL GRAVES

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