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**On the cover:** The hearty Ford F-350 Lariat Crew Cab tows Gateway's 38-foot-long fiver that brims with features. Photo by Stuart Bourdon.



# Premium Video Access

Tips, how-to and lifestyle



Everyone knows “real men” don’t read instructions. For guys, assembling a new product and figuring out how it works is supposedly intuitive. Unfortunately, too many of us end up with our tails between our legs as we muddle through tricky situations trying to save face.

Today’s technology is a game-changer. Modern products are driven by high-tech circuitry and lots of buttons, and quite frankly, unless you have the mind of an 8-year-old, operational instructions can be difficult to follow — at least for those of us with limited patience and a fear of 200-page owner’s manuals.

For many owners, working on systems and accessories is a mystery. While instruction and repair manuals are useful, they sometimes add a new level of stress to a project. Before tackling a project I’m uncertain of, I’ll check for a video online that shows how it’s done. In many cases, these videos are amateurish and thin on content, but there’s usually enough info to make a decision on whether or not to tackle the project.

Recognizing that the video trend is growing, *Trailer Life* and sister publication *MotorHome* built a new website that caters to premium-quality how-to content that is sure to change the way most of us handle projects and gain knowledge about RVs and the lifestyle. Under the Good Sam/Trailer Life logo, we launched the website [www.trailerlife.tv](http://www.trailerlife.tv) last year. During the introductory period we posted a number of how-to videos showing viewers useful tips and instructional information on many aspects of the RV lifestyle.

By the time you receive this issue, you’ll have an opportunity to subscribe to the next level of our video website, *Trailer Life.TV Full Access*. This new premium access on [www.trailerlife.tv](http://www.trailerlife.tv) is earmarked to be the leading destination for technical RV video content. Here you’ll have unlimited access to videos on maintenance, installation of appliances and accessories and how-to workshops. Once you sign up, you’ll have immediate access to 10-plus hours of premium content featuring original expert tips and exclusive projects — all designed to take the mystery out of RV ownership. You’ll even be able to stream a full-length DVD of original content four times a year. Videos will be updated monthly.

And all this video can be viewed on your computer, tablet or smartphone. Log on to [www.trailerlife.tv](http://www.trailerlife.tv) to learn about a number of special offers for Good Sam members. Regular price for premium access is \$29.97 per year.

Trailer Life.TV Full Access is just the ticket for guys who hate to read instructions. Now they can watch in privacy, learn the process and look like they know what they’re doing. And guys, don’t get too smug; the gals will be watching, too.

– Bob Livingston, publisher

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**Managing Editor** Donya Carlson  
**Assistant Editor** Brenda Hutchinson  
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**Production Manager** Angela Schmieg  
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**Consulting Editors** Wes Caughlan, Ken Freund, Jeff Johnston  
**Contributors** Bob Ashley, Stuart Bourdon, Kristopher Bunker, Len Cousineau, Bill and Jenn Gehr, Bill Graves, Chris Hemer, Guy and Pamela Selbert, Bruce W. Smith

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

**RV Marketplace** Sue Seidlitz  
 10556 Combie Road #6443, Auburn, CA 95602  
 Tel 530-268-3005 Fax 530-653-2090  
[sue.seidlitz@goodsam.com](mailto:sue.seidlitz@goodsam.com)

**Classifieds** Kathy Schurman  
 3300 Fernbrook Ln N Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55447  
 Tel 763-383-4437 Fax 763-383-4499  
[kathy.schurman@goodsam.com](mailto:kathy.schurman@goodsam.com)

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

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

Scott Oakes, John Marciano (Western Region)  
 1818 Westlake Avenue, N. #420  
 Seattle, WA 98109  
 Tel 206-283-9545 Fax 206-283-9571

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

**Chairman Emeritus** Art Rouse  
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**Production Specialist** Cherri Perschmann, **Digital Advertising and Marketing Manager** Jeffrey Larson, **Senior Marketing Manager** Kathryn Knudson, **Administrative Assistant-Audience Development** Molly Sullivan, **Digital Media Manager** Chris Soash, **Digital Marketing Specialist** Kathryn Benson, **Digital Editor** Nicholas Upton, **Associate Editor** Chris Gerber

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"We recently bought our 3rd fifth wheel trailer. When we set our rig up, my dealer recommended a Husky 26kW. Wow, what a difference that hitch has made. I never new that hookup could be that easy, and the ride is so smooth."

- Randy  
26kW customer  
Redding, CA



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**Priceless**

I read Bob Motschmann's letter in the March issue ("Real-World Expenses") regarding Bill Graves' comment on spending \$32 per night for a campsite at a resort as opposed to \$162 for a room at the same resort. Motschmann attempts to belittle Graves' comment by trying to include the cost of the truck and trailer in the campsite price.

Motschmann, stop thinking so much. I did not buy my truck and trailer just to save \$130 per night at a specific resort. They are already sitting in my driveway. Therefore, I do not consider them a direct expense of the trip. If you insist on using your logic, you still need a car with maintenance, insurance and fuel costs, not to mention the vehicle's initial cost, to get you to the room.

Again using Motschmann's logic, I figure \$40,000 for a decent car, not including wear and tear, flat tires, etc., as opposed to his \$100,000 estimate for a nice camper and tow vehicle. For the \$60,000 difference, you can spend 370 nights out at \$162 per night, a drastic reduction of his original 617 nights out result.

Even so, for me, one night in my fifth-wheel trailer, as opposed to 370 nights in a room used by thousands of others before me, is "priceless."

**Kevin Martin, Woodhaven, Michigan**

I read Mr. Motschmann's thoughts on an RV versus staying at a hotel. He brings up many valid points about initial cost of truck and trailer, etc., but I think he failed to factor in several things in his evaluation. He said sleep might be better in a hotel. Me, I sleep better in my own bed with the sounds of nature around me instead of noisy people in the hallways or next door. I also wonder if he stays at a hotel next to his home. If not, how does he get there? If he goes by plane or car, these costs were not figured in. When he gets there

**Historic Highway 66**

I am enjoying the Route 66 articles by Pam Selbert, especially the March issue including Oklahoma. Regarding the Pony Bridge (which is on U.S. 281, not U.S. 270, I believe), I visit that area often, and kin folks told me this story: A little east of the bridge is a new road called U.S. 281 Spur. A percent of Spur is also old 66. When they reworked that section, they trucked a part of old 66 with "the treacherous curbs" (as stated in the article) to the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.

**Larry Wileman, Raymore, Missouri**



he needs to eat out. This usually costs more than cooking in an RV. And, does he rent a car when he gets there?

But I think the reason most RV people travel that way is not so much for the destination, but the enjoyment of the trip, and the time spent together with the family while on the road instead of squeezed in a plane seat next to strangers. As the well-known saying goes, "Priceless."

**Jim Plesko, Rosemont, Illinois**

**Taking Action**

You recently featured a letter from a gentleman who had been monitoring *RV Action Line* for manufacturers of RVs that appear more than others. I, too, have been doing that and I pay close attention to those that find ways to not stand behind their products or their workmanship. We had a problem with a construction error on our 2005 Keystone Cougar that resulted in damage to the outside skin and Keystone used the out-of-warranty card to deny all responsibility. Thank you for the service you provide.

**Veto J. LaSalle, Hamilton, Montana**

**Advice for the "Little Guy"**

Tim Walton talks about performance tuners in the March issue (*Gaining Performance*) to increase horsepower and torque. Great for hauling large

RVs. But I never seem to read about that for the "little" guy. I have a 2010 Super Crew Ford F-150 three-valve 5.0-liter Flex-Fuel engine. I use it to tow a 2003 Fleetwood travel trailer with (MOR/ryde) Independent Suspension, weighed in by MOR/ryde at 5,100 pounds. Ford's literature rates the 5.0-liter three-valve at 310 horsepower, 3.5:1 axle ratio, on standard fuel. It jumps to 320 horsepower with 105-octane ethanol. I added a Walker rear-exit dual exhaust system, which Walker says gives it 17 horsepower. This increased the horsepower to 327 and increased torque. My son tells me I am now burning fuel that was wasted. One can increase torque and horsepower without performance tuners, and have a little bit of fun doing it.

**Bob Valente, Novi, Michigan**

**f FACEBOOK POLL**

How much time out of the year do you bring your kids or grandkids RVing?

**33% Never**

- 26% A few days
- 13% 2-4 weeks
- 7% Every weekend
- 7% 6 months
- 7% Full time
- 7% Every time

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PHOTOS BY GUY SELBERT



The Patee House served as headquarters for the Pony Express in 1860. This reproduction of a Central Overland stagecoach is in the lobby. It was on just such a coach that Samuel Clemens and his brother traveled west to Carson City, Nevada, where Clemens would get a job as a newspaper writer and take the pen name of Mark Twain. The Patee House Museum has the receipt for their tickets on display.

## Smithsonian of the Midwest

St. Joseph, Missouri: Start of the Pony Express and the end of Jesse James by Pamela Selbert

The Patee House in St. Joseph, Missouri, opened in 1858, a luxury four-story hotel with 140 guest rooms. It was the largest hotel west of the Mississippi and one of the finest in the world, ahead of its time with gas lights, running water and flush toilets, a steam table in the dining room and an enormous ballroom on the second floor.

Two years later the Patee became headquarters for the Pony Express, for which it was later designated a National Historic Landmark. After the Civil War began in 1861, the hotel served as the Provost Marshal's office and, eventually, military headquarters for the Union general of all of Northwest Missouri.

Over its first century the grand brick structure went through various incarnations — three times as a hotel, twice as a girls' college, and for nearly 80 years, a shirt factory that closed in 1957. The Patee stood empty for the

next six years, then after the Pony Express Historical Association was formed, a museum run by the association was begun, opening in 1963. It's as fine a museum as you'll find anywhere, and has been called the "Smithsonian of the Midwest."

Among the hundreds of exhibits filling two floors are a covered wagon loaded with supplies for the frontier; shiny custom-built classic autos; model trains and dozens of other intriguing toys; an elegant 1854 saloon where visitors can drink sarsaparilla while listening to the Nickelodeon; fine antique furniture, glassware and other items; Pony Express memorabilia; a 1920s service station; even a whimsical carousel called "Wild Thing" that was new in the 1940s and can be ridden by "kids" of all ages.

Also on museum grounds is the home Jesse James was living in with

his family when he was shot dead in April 1882 by the "coward" Robert Ford, a member of the James' gang. The house, originally located several blocks away, was moved here in the 1970s. Visitors can see the hole in the wall made by the bullet that killed Jesse, and the framed embroidery he had been cleaning when shot, among other artifacts. The home is also run by the Pony Express Historical Association.

Patee House Museum/Jesse James Home is at 12th and Penn, St. Joseph, Missouri. For information call 816-232-8206 or visit [www.ponyexpressjessejames.com](http://www.ponyexpressjessejames.com).



In this small house is where Thomas Howard, a.k.a. Jesse James, was shot by Robert Ford. The owner of the Patee House moved the house to this location in the 1970s.

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## Pet-Friendly Parks for 2013

When it comes to selecting a campground, many RVers seek out parks that offer a wide range of pet-friendly amenities, from dog runs to trails for dog walking to flexible rules that allow their particular breed of dog. To help pet owners find the RV parks that open their arms to canines and other travel companions, the editors and consultants of the *Good Sam RV Travel Guide & Campground Directory* have compiled a list of the Top Pet-Friendly Parks of 2013. Featuring RV parks from across North America, the list is tailored for RV travelers seeking facilities that welcome pet owners with open arms.

The *Good Sam RV Travel Guide's* Top Pet-Friendly Parks are Good Life RV Resort and Sun Life RV Resort,



Mesa, Arizona; Sunflower RV Resort, Surprise, Arizona; Circle RV Resort-Sunland, El Cajon, California; Rio Bend RV and Golf Resort, El Centro, California; Garden of the Gods Campground, Colorado Springs, Colorado; Royal View at Royal Gorge Campground, Canon City, Colorado; Ocala Sun RV Resort, Ocala, Florida; Deer Creek Valley RV Park, Topeka, Kansas; Evergreen Park RV Resort, Mount Eaton, Ohio; and Horn Rapids RV Resort, Richland, Washington.

## NEWSWIRE

### NEW STORE



### Camping World RV Park

Camping World and Good Sam Enterprises have announced plans to open a new supercenter in the Valdosta, Georgia, area in November which will feature the first co-located, co-branded 150-site campground and rally park for the company. In addition, the store will offer a wide array of RV sales, service, collision, repair, parts and accessories. The full-service campground will feature swimming pools, meeting rooms, pet playgrounds and special rates for Good Sam Club members. The facility will be located off Interstate 75, exit 5, in Lake Park, Georgia.

### COUGAR CONTEST



### Win a Keystone Cougar Xlite

Kampgrounds of America (KOA) has again teamed with Keystone RV to offer campers a chance to win a \$40,000 Keystone Cougar Xlite Travel Trailer plus a decade of free KOA camping. In addition to the grand prize, there will be weekly prizes from KOA and fellow sponsors Cabela's and Weber Grills. The 2013 Great KOA Giveaway kicked off March 1 and runs through September 16. For more information on the 2013 Great KOA Giveaway and to enter, go to [www.greatkoagiveaway.com](http://www.greatkoagiveaway.com) or Keystone's Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/KeystoneRV](http://www.facebook.com/KeystoneRV).

### BUSINESS



### Coming to America

HYMER AG, a \$1.7-billion company that is the leading leisure vehicle manufacturer in Europe, is planning on entering the U.S. RV marketplace. According to an RVBusiness.com interview with Roel L.W. Nizet, CEO and chairman of HYMER Group's executive board, HYMER plans "to start with two, probably three models, which we will adapt to the American market, meeting 110 voltage, and we will adjust the gas to the American standard." HYMER is looking to finalize a joint venture manufacturing agreement with an American concern. [www.hymer.com/cms/en](http://www.hymer.com/cms/en).

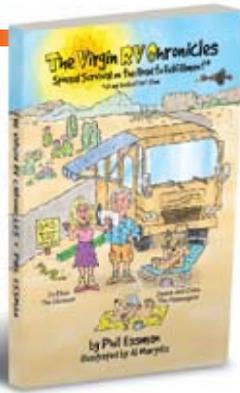
## The Virgin RV Chronicles

Phil Essman and his wife Jo Ellen rented an RV and took off on a 4,000-mile RV journey across the Southwest. It was their first time in a motorhome and they "committed almost every one of the rookie cardinal sins" in their travels, which Phil documented in his book, *The Virgin RV Chronicles*. The book's description reads, "Spousal survival on the road to fulfillment" and it is an entertaining look at how this married couple was able to stay sane during all their "together" time. It'll have you chuckling at firsthand anecdotes and descriptions.

Essman wrote about their adventures and misadventures for anyone interested in taking an RV across the country. The book includes entertaining black-and-white illustrations and photos from the Essmans' trip. The husband-and-wife team enjoyed their trip so much that they're currently shopping for their own RV.

All proceeds from sales of *The Virgin RV Chronicles* go to St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee.

MSRP: \$5.99 (Kindle edition) and \$12.95 paperback, [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).



## Good Sam Plans First Northeast Rally

Thousands of RV enthusiasts and Good Sam members will converge on the Empire Expo Center in Syracuse, New York, June 13 to 16 for the Camping World/Good Sam Rally, where they'll tour hundreds of new RVs, peruse the latest RV gear and enjoy a full slate of RV seminars.

Syracuse is rolling out the welcome mat for plenty of rally favorites, including Robin Dickson, president of Dogs for the Deaf, who's presiding over the tail-wagging Rally Dog Show, and Fred Moore, Flags4Vets founder and Good Sam's 2012 RVer of the Year, who's leading the Salute to Veterans. *Trailer Life* and *MotorHome* Publisher Bob Livingston unlocks the mysteries of RV ownership in an informative and entertaining seminar. TV chef, cookbook author and culinary adventurer Bob Blumer will be back with his innovative recipes and simple cooking techniques.

There will also be world-class entertainment including performances by Reba, the Queen of Country, and legendary entertainer Wayne Newton who will take the stage to show rallygoers why he earned the nickname Mr. Las Vegas. Call 800-701-1399 or visit [www.therally.com](http://www.therally.com).

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### WEB-EXCLUSIVE



► In this month's Web Exclusive, look for more sights along Route 66 from Amarillo, Texas, to Flagstaff, Arizona, in author Pamela Selbert's four-part series.

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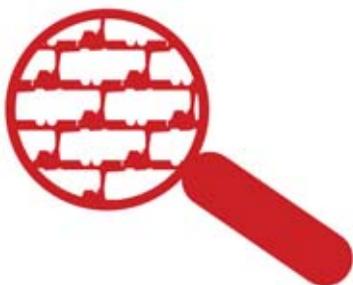
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## Bed Bugged

Unable to work out a satisfactory solution to a mechanical problem in his trailer, a reader asked *RV Action Line* to intervene. He wrote:

» In April 2012 I bought a 2013 Attitude Toy Hauler manufactured by Eclipse RV from Guaranty RV in Junction City, Oregon. In November 2012 it experienced a problem while we were returning home from a camping trip: The rear power bed/couch powered itself down while I was driving and collapsed on top of one of my ATVs.

It had done this with quite a lot of force as the drive chain had backed up slack a couple of links of chain on the return drive side of the system and the ATV rims were almost touching the floor (flat tires). The impact bent the frame of the sofa-bed quite a bit and tore two holes in the back cushion of the sofa and also stretched out the material.

In addition, the power switch would not work so I could not power the sofa back up out of the way. I thought that either the switch or motor had burned out. This system is only electrically powered.

I contacted Guaranty RV and asked them to get authorization from Eclipse RV to replace the bent sofa-bed frame and at least the sofa-bed back cushion where it had been torn and stretched from powering down on top of the ATV. I also asked that Guaranty RV get authorization from Eclipse RV to have the repair shop install a power

on/off toggle switch in the control panel ahead of the bed control switch to act as a cutoff switch so this couldn't ever happen again.

Eclipse RV denied the mattress replacement and the sofa-bed frame and cushion replacement requests. It did authorize Guaranty RV to install a disconnect switch at the back of the trailer between the stock up/down bed switch and the bed motor. I don't think this is acceptable because now I could have constant power in the wall of the trailer if the stock switch stick fails again. I think this could result in a fire and is a safety issue.

**Jimmie Smith, Alsea, Oregon**

*RV Action Line* contacted Eclipse RV and Guaranty RV to see if there was anything further that could be done to help Smith. We did not hear from Eclipse RV, but we did receive a speedy reply from Guaranty RV.

### THE COMPANY RESPONDED

We are pleased and relieved to inform you that Eclipse RV has shipped parts and authorized repairs to move forward on Mr. Smith's Attitude. We understand that Eclipse and/or Smith may have already been in contact to advise you of this progress. If not, please accept this letter as an update that we are progressing forward, and believe that Smith is satisfied with the response received thus far.

**Jolene Thomson**  
Guaranty RV Super Centers,  
Junction City, Oregon

**TAKE ACTION** » *RV Action Line* is a forum for the resolution of conflicts between consumers and RV dealers and manufacturers, accessories suppliers and service providers. After exhausting all other resources without success, please send a typed letter to *RV Action Line*, 2575 Vista Del Mar Drive, Ventura, California 93001. Include copies of appropriate bills and correspondence as well as a self-addressed, stamped envelope.



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# Trekking Poles

Not just for mountain climbers

**T**hink people look silly walking or hiking on trails with sticks in their hands? Think again. Those sticks are high-tech trekking poles with adjustable-length sections, rubber or metal tips, and specially designed and formed handles with straps for the wrists. They can help enhance your stability, stride and support on the trail. They can also offer better balance and footing on rugged terrain. On downhill stretches they can alleviate the stress on your knees and leg and hip joints.

They make crossing loose rocks, slippery surfaces such as ice or patches of snow, or even the occasional stream much safer and easier. During uphill climbs, trekking poles help transfer some of the weight (if you are carrying a daypack)

to your shoulders, arms and back, reducing strain on your legs and helping to push you up the hill.

Poles can also be used to push back overhanging vegetation (could be poison oak!) or explore soggy trail bottoms before walking on them.

There are different kinds of trekking poles: antishock, standard, compact or women's, hiking staff and Nordic walking. We will focus on the first four, which are the most common.

Antishock poles are good for those with weak or damaged hips, knees or ankles, and feature internal springs that absorb shock when used for walking downhill. This feature can be turned off when hiking uphill.

Standard poles don't have springs and are typically less expensive, but still offer the benefits of stability, control and support.

Compact or women's trekking poles are shorter, have smaller hand grips and are typically lighter. These also make good poles for kids.

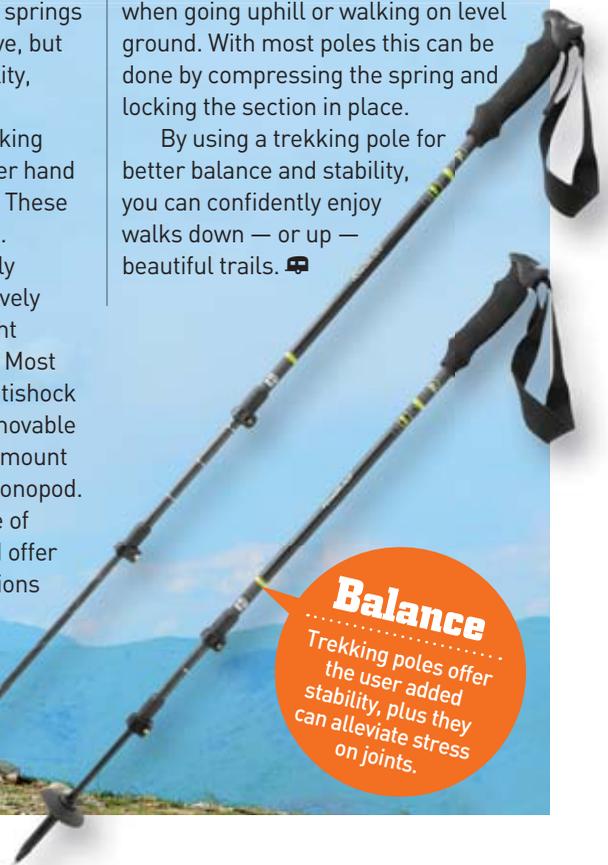
Hiking staffs are commonly used as a single pole on relatively level terrain and with no weight (daypack) on the hiker's back. Most are adjustable and offer an antishock feature. Some also have a removable handle that reveals a camera mount so the staff can double as a monopod.

The better poles are made of aluminum or carbon fiber and offer two or three interlocking sections

that can be adjusted to suit your height. Carbide or steel tips are used for traction, and removable "baskets" on the tips can keep them from sinking too deep into soft terrain.

Using trekking poles is easy once you get the hang of it. Top brand poles provide numbers on the shafts to assist in setting the length. The total height of the pole should be set so that your elbow is at 90 degrees when you are standing upright. For best results and maximum strength, be sure that each section is set at approximately the same length. Small adjustments should be made depending upon terrain, though. Poles should be lengthened slightly when walking downhill for better control and balance. Uphill, the pole should be shortened by a few inches for increased load-bearing pressure. And if you are on unlevel ground, adjust the poles accordingly or grip one lower if it offers an extended grip. Antilock systems should be turned off when going uphill or walking on level ground. With most poles this can be done by compressing the spring and locking the section in place.

By using a trekking pole for better balance and stability, you can confidently enjoy walks down — or up — beautiful trails. 📷



**Balance**  
Trekking poles offer the user added stability, plus they can alleviate stress on joints.

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# A Hidden Treasure

Sapphire-blue waters surrounded by mountain peaks in Northern California

**W**ithin Northern California's Klamath Mountains sits an area of such overwhelming natural beauty that professional *en plein air* artists can apply each year to spend up to four weeks rendering on canvas the gorgeous landscapes within Whiskeytown National Recreation Area. Fewer than 30 such artist-in-residence programs exist within the National Park System, so being able to mingle nature and art within this nearly 40,000-acre wonderland is quite a cherished post.

Yet visitors to the recreation area — located seven miles west of Redding, two hours north of Sacramento and 3 1/2 hours north of San Francisco — don't have to be able to distinguish between Monet and Manet, though they should appreciate the range of colors in the blue, green and brown spectrums. More than 70 miles of hiking trails wend through pine, fir and cedar forests, skirt the flanks of canyons and cross streams. The park's color palette, of course, expands in

the spring, as wildflowers brighten the hillsides, and in the fall, when the ruddy hues of change prevail. Nearly two-dozen hikes, ranging from the easy Buck Hollow Trail to the difficult Rich Gulch Trail, grant visitors access to the park's significant attractions, including its four waterfalls.

Whiskeytown's primary draw, however, is its sapphire-blue lake with 36 miles of shoreline. Whiskeytown Lake allows summertime visitors to cool off by swimming, sailing, kayaking, water-skiing or scuba diving. Visitors can fish from boats or from the shore, and travelers who prefer their recreation to involve terra firma can explore the park on horseback and navigate some of the country's best mountain-biking trails. Guests who enjoy motorized entertainment can head to the summit of Shasta Bally in four-wheel-drive vehicles. And park rangers lead tours of historic buildings and mines that remain from the region's Gold Rush days.



Visitors can explore Whiskeytown year round, though they should be prepared to encounter snow at the higher elevations. Day-use passes cost \$5, 7-day passes cost \$10, and the \$25 annual pass to Whiskeytown also allows visitors access to nearby Lassen Volcanic National Park. Brandy Creek RV Campground within Whiskeytown National Recreation Area offers dry camping on a first-come, first-served basis, and is within walking distance of the lake. 📍

**Whiskeytown National Recreation Area**  
530-246-1225, [www.nps.gov/whis](http://www.nps.gov/whis)



## DID YOU KNOW?

Shasta Bally Summit is the highest point in Whiskeytown at 6,175 feet and snow is usually seen there through June.



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# ALL ABOARD

Experience the highs and lows of the Rocky Mountains on the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad

**B**ob Hey could probably prepare for this trip in his sleep, retying his 26-foot trailer and all. He has been doing it every spring for 11 years. This is his second year, however, of doing it alone. His wife was always with him. Unfortunately, she recently passed away.

Bob lives just outside of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. With his trailer in tow, it's a three-day drive from there to Chama, New Mexico, where he spends the summer, before heading back home the middle of October.

"My wife and I could not leave home before Mother's Day, of course, because we have three daughters. So I still do that, even now. That puts me in Chama in time to help get things ready for the trains that start running on Memorial Day weekend."

Bob, at 73, is a docent — actually the docent coordinator — on the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad that runs between Chama and Antonito, Colorado — track distance 64 miles. A train runs every day during the

summer, departing at 10 a.m. from both places, stopping for an hour for lunch, and arriving at the other end at 4:40 p.m. A bus takes passengers back to where they boarded the train — road distance 50 miles.

"I like people and I like trains," Bob said. "So this is perfect — living in the mountains, riding the train three days a week. I meet people from all over the world. My job is to tell them about the railroad and answer questions. I couldn't have it any better." On his days off, he helps around the railroad yard or packs his camera and goes hiking.

In North America, we have 305 tourist trains — that's more than four times as many as the rest of the world has combined. Obviously, in America we love our old trains. And it's not just the romantic in us; it's more the American in us that recognizes that trains built this country. They reshaped the East and opened the West. Trains, powered by steam, moved freight, food, people and mail on this continent for more than a century.



# RD!



(Main) The train makes "switchback" turns to accommodate for the changes in elevation in its 64-mile trek. (Top) A night crew takes over in the railyard to keep the fires going so the locomotives are ready to go in the morning.

## CUMBRES & TOLTEC SCENIC RAILROAD

None of these old trains could run today without the manpower (and womanpower) provided by volunteers: We're talking thousands of them. Bob, a retired police officer, is just one of those who works to keep our railroad heritage alive. He spends five months out of the year in his trailer — apparently doing exactly what he wants to do with his retirement years.

The Cumbres & Toltec was built in

1880 as part of the Rio Grande's San Juan Extension of the Denver & Rio Grande Western that originally served the silver mines in the mountains of southwestern Colorado. It was built with narrow-gauge track of 3 feet between the rails, instead of the standard-gauge 4 feet, 8½ inches. The main reason was that sharper turns could be laid with the narrower gauge, important when navigating along mountain ridges.

After the demand for silver tanked around the turn of the century, the railroad struggled. Good times in the 1920s allowed for the purchase of "modern" steam engines that are still in use here. Except for a respite during World War II, the Cumbres & Toltec never recovered from the Depression. Most narrow-gauge lines in the Rocky Mountains were scrapped in the '50s. Unfortunately, in 1969 the use of steam locomotives in general freight service ended in this country.

Between Chama and Durango, part of the main line's abandoned track was dismantled. But thanks to those inflicted with the enchantment of trains, the scenic portion of the line was saved. In 1970, the states of Colorado and New Mexico jointly bought the track and sideline structures from Antonito to Chama, nine steam locomotives, more than 130 freight and work cars, the yards and maintenance facility, all for \$547,120. The following year the new railroad began hauling passengers.

Today, the Cumbres & Toltec Railroad has four operating coal-fired and steam-operated locomotives (and they hope to get a fifth one running!) and offers one of the great scenic rides of the Rockies on America's longest and highest narrow-gauge railroad. Climbing to an elevation of 10,015 feet at one point, passengers are treated to views of steep gorges, sheer cliffs, broad valleys and a few cattle ranches. Around Antonito, the train passes through a pinyon-juniper forest and across desert plains of sagebrush.

The trains snake along the Colorado/New Mexico border, moving at 20 to 25 mph. They pass over high trestles across rivers, through tunnels under mountains and make some "whiplash" turns as they loop back on themselves to gain or lose elevation. Each train burns about 4 tons of coal each day.

**Bob Hey lives in his trailer during the summer when he is on the job with the railroad.**



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(Left to right) Every train makes a stop midway in its journey to take on water for the locomotive's boiler. Campgrounds in Chama, New Mexico, are right on the Chama River.



Osier, on the Colorado side at 9,637 feet elevation, is roughly the halfway point. It was once a stagecoach stop and a small railroad town. The trains meet here at lunchtime. In the station's dining hall hot meals are served upstairs — reminded me of a military chow line — with a salad bar downstairs.

Since many of you may have not ridden this train, allow me to suggest the best way to do it. Drive to Chama — it's 106 miles north of Santa Fe on U.S. Route 84. Three RV parks here make your choices easy, and one is a short walk to the train station.

Yes, there are dog sitters in Chama. And since you'll have to leave your furry friend(s) behind, the Cumbres & Toltec's website has a list of kennels. Click on "Ride With Us" and you'll find them under "Passenger Information."

At 8:30 a.m., take the railroad's bus — included with your train ticket — to Antonito. Board the train there and ride back to Chama. After six hours of riding the rails, when you get back to Chama, you are "home" and can then relax and think back on your day of beautiful scenery and the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains.

Another advantage of taking the westbound train from Antonio is that you are saving the best for last. The high mesa country coming out of Antonito has its own spartan beauty. But when you get back on the train after lunch, you are in the mountains with views normally reserved for eagles and mountain goats.

At Windy Point, one of the most famous places in American railroading, the rails are laid on a rock shelf, carved from the face of a cliff. The train then begins a 4 percent down grade — accentuated by squeaking brakes — into the Rio Chama valley.

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## CUMBRES & TOLTEC SCENIC RAILROAD



(Top) The Cumbres & Toltec Railroad operates four coal-fired, steam-operated, narrow-gauge locomotives. (Above) Parlor car guests ride in a carpeted, paneled coach featuring complementary snacks and beverages.

Chama is a small mountain town: elevation 7,871 feet, population 1,250. The town is there primarily because of the train, but lumber and outdoor recreation contribute to its economy. During the months the train is running (this year's schedule is May 25 through October 20), all the shops and eateries in town are open by 7 a.m. for those who want breakfast or to shop before the train or bus leaves.

After the morning rush, things are pretty quiet in town the rest of the day, "But when we hear the train whistle as it comes down the grade, the town comes alive again." said a Chama resident. The train pulls in at 4:40 p.m. By 7 p.m., except for a few restaurants that stay open, the town of Chama is closed up.

By the evening, the train has been cleaned and is ready for the next day's scenic ride. The engine has been turned over to the shop crew who keep its fire going all night. In those dark hours, the engine groans and moans like a leashed animal. 🚂

*To read about more train adventures with Bill Graves, see page 90 about the French Lick Scenic Railway in Indiana.*

### For information on the Cumbres & Toltec Railroad:

888-CUMBRES (286-2737)

Chama, New Mexico, Depot: 575-756-2151

Antonito, Colorado, Depot: 719-376-5483

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# HISTORIC ROUTE

Traveling the Main Street of America from



The ancient ruins of Mission Nuestra Señora (Our Lady) at Pecos National Historic Park east of Santa Fe, New Mexico, date back to the early 1600s. (Inset, top left) Statuary group of Santa Fe Trail traders on Museum Hill in Santa Fe. (Inset, top right) The 1950s Studebaker and Buick are part of the decor at Wigwam Motel in Holbrook, Arizona, pattern for the motel in the movie *Cars*. (Opposite page) Cadillac Ranch west of Amarillo, Texas, shows off the history of the tail fin with Cadillacs half-buried nose-deep in the ground.



# TE 66: PART III

Amarillo, Texas, to Flagstaff, Arizona

**B**y early morning of day 10 on our five-week Route 66 odyssey we had said goodbye to Amarillo, Texas, and were watching this town of horses, cowboys, rodeos and more fade from view in our pickup's rearview mirror. For the next two weeks we would be en route to Flagstaff, Arizona, a trip that includes some of the finest attractions the United States has to offer.

Cadillac Ranch just west of Amarillo hardly falls into this category. But the whimsical row of 10 antique Caddies (1949 to 1963), liberally decorated with sprayed-on graffiti and buried hood-deep in the ground, while not actually on Route 66, has been an icon for decades of the old road.

Created in 1974 for millionaire Stanley Marsh 3 to represent the "Golden Age of the American Automobile," Cadillac Ranch is visited by more than 25 million Route 66 travelers every year. Cans of spray paint for visitors to use lie on the dusty ground between the cars, and there's no shortage of takers.

From Amarillo west to the state line is about 70 miles. The old road parallels

the westbound lane of Interstate 40 through country where no hills break the view to the horizon in any direction, and trees are rare as rubies.

At Vega, Texas, population 884, we recommend visiting Dot's Mini Museum. Owner Betty Carpenter's mother, Dot Leavitt, now deceased, came here in 1946 and opened the museum years later. Once-flourishing Vega dwindled after I-40 bypassed it in the 1960s, Carpenter says, but Route 66 travelers stop at the museum, which is crammed with 1940s and '50s memorabilia.

Just past Adrian, the land transforms into hills, knobs and mesas dotted with fat green junipers. But by the time you reach Gruhkey, where the frontage road dead-ends and you

continue for about 16 miles on the interstate, the hills have vanished.

Glenrio, on the border of Texas and New Mexico, was once a bustling farming community served by the Chicago, Rock Island and Gulf Railway and later by Route 66. The desolate town is now long abandoned by railroad and highway. A handful of empty-eyed adobe homes with sagging roofs remain, and also a vacant post office, filling station and an old-fashioned motel and its sign with letters missing still standing at the old road, where fractured slabs sprout tall weeds.

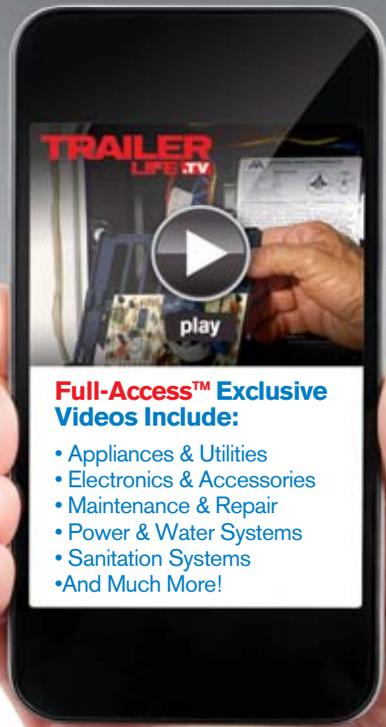
Nonetheless, the town is a photographer's dream. Slowly being reclaimed by the desert, it has become a cholla world. These stout treelike cactuses with angular branches and wicked spines belie their true nature in late spring by donning halos of magnificent pink-satin blooms.

These, and the less-lethal prickly pear cactuses, sage, yellow buttercups, white sprigs of lantana and stiletto-like yuccas, join in an unending dance,



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## Main Street of America

propelled by a hot wind. Looking north you can see termite-size cars moving along I-40, but there is no sound other than the rushing of the relentless wind.

Ahead is New Mexico, which once claimed more than 500 circuitous miles of Route 66 — before the “Santa Fe Loop” was bypassed in 1937 in favor of a straight-line route across the state that shortened the trip by more than 100 miles.

At Glenrio Visitor Center just inside the state line, pick up maps and travel information, then visit nearby Russell’s Truck & Travel Center, a grand 30,000-square-foot establishment. Inside is a retro-style diner, a store and a free car museum featuring two-dozen magnificently restored vintage autos.

You can no longer drive historic Route 66 uninterrupted across the Land of Enchantment, and there are stretches where you must use I-40.

Route 66, lined with old-fashioned motels and RV parks, is still the main thoroughfare through Tucumcari. Neon-lit Blue Swallow Motel was built in 1939 and added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1993.

Other attractions include the Route 66 Photo Museum, where dozens of Route 66 images by Michael Campanelli are exhibited; Tucumcari Historical Museum, with artifacts displayed in a 1903 schoolhouse; and Mission Revival-style Tucumcari Train Depot, built in 1926 and the last remaining railroad building in this former railroad-center

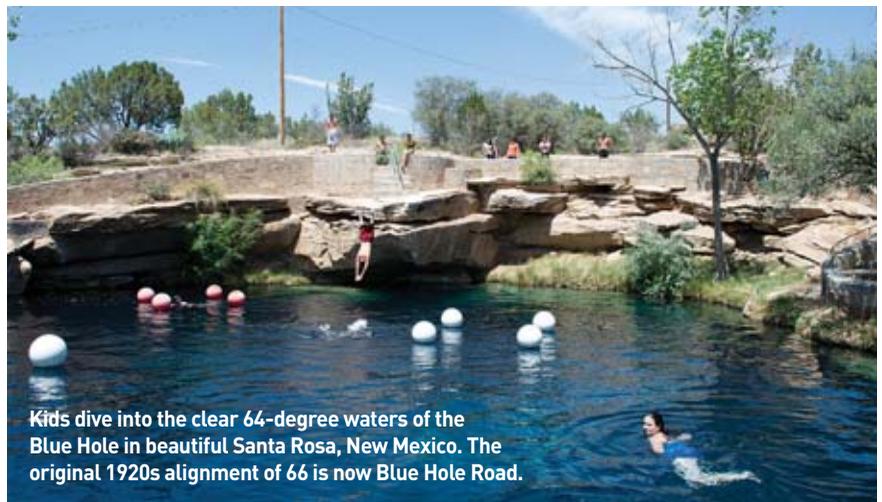
town. A Route 66 monument by artist Thomas Coffin is outside the Tucumcari Convention Center and sports a chrome Cadillac-like tail fin and stylized “66” pointed west.

The road winds on through a string of lonely desert towns to busy Santa Rosa, where streets lined with buildings of earth-tone sandstone and adobe could be straight out of Old Mexico. Santa Rosa attracts scuba divers to the Blue Hole, a magnificent azure pool 80 feet in diameter that expands to 130 feet at the bottom, and has a constant temperature of 64 degrees.

Continuing past the Blue Hole you can drive the original Mother Road alignment up into the hills (don’t try it towing your trailer, as the road is steep, winding and narrow). The lonely road, edged with sandstone boulders, junipers, cholla and fleshy lobes of prickly pear, gives a good impression of what driving here in a Model-T must have been like.

Santa Fe is a highlight of any trip to New Mexico, but should you want to bypass it, continue west from Santa Rosa on I-40 to Exit 203, and follow the old road to Albuquerque, where the Santa Fe Loop rejoins the later alignment.

Otherwise, drive north on U.S. Highway 84, the pre-1937 alignment of Route 66, through a landscape of round, flat boulders that could be huge desert tortoises dozing among the junipers. At quiet Dilia, a town that pre-dates Route 66 by nearly a century, aging adobe



Kids dive into the clear 64-degree waters of the Blue Hole in beautiful Santa Rosa, New Mexico. The original 1920s alignment of 66 is now Blue Hole Road.



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Sacred Heart Church, a handful of empty houses and an old garage all seem to be melting back into the earth.

The old road proceeds west and retraces the final 58 miles of the 19th-century transportation route Santa Fe Trail into the state capital. Though the interstate is never more than a few dozen feet away, it's hidden by thick stands of junipers. Santa Fe is a town rich in art and four centuries of history. This is a shopper's paradise. Santa Fe claims more art galleries per capita than anywhere else in the country, many of them located along a mile-long stretch of antique Canyon Road. There's a large farmers' market at the railyard where you can buy everything from lemongrass soap and chili powder to beeswax candles and fine baskets. Elsewhere, under the south portico at the Palace of the Governors, dozens of Native Americans market their hand-crafted jewelry and pottery. A highlight of our visit was an afternoon at the

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum.

We also attended a Confirmation Mass at the magnificent Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi. The Romanesque-Revival cathedral was built between 1869 and 1886 on the site of a 1714 adobe church that in turn had replaced a 1626 church destroyed during the Pueblo Revolt of 1680.

Leaving Santa Fe, Route 66 heads southwest toward Albuquerque. Today much of the old road can't be driven and you follow I-25. But at Exit 264 you can drive four miles west on New Mexico Highway 16, then right on the paved road for about a mile to a narrow, rutted road leading to the foot of La Bajada Hill. You don't want to drive this road as it is the most difficult segment of old Route 66, and is advisable for only four-wheel-drive vehicles.

As you head for Albuquerque, watch signs carefully as following Route 66 at this part is tricky. Albuquerque is popular for outdoor activities, par-



Moonscape lava flows crumple over El Malpais (Badlands) National Monument near Grants, New Mexico.

ticularly hiking, biking, golfing and ballooning. For a week in early October the city celebrates the annual Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, with more than 500 colorful hot-air balloons taking to the skies as more than 800,000 visitors watch. Balloon rides are available year-round. Like Santa Fe, Albuquerque is rich in art.

West of Albuquerque, past Exit 126, old Route 66 loops back and forth, paralleling I-40 to the state line.

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About eight miles east of Grants the ground suddenly becomes a veritable moonscape thick with crusty black lava, broken slabs, cracked domes and depressions. This is McCarty's Pahoehoe Lava Flow at El Malpais National Monument. It's one of the country's more recent lava flows, occurring 3,000 years ago. Today the area is popular for hiking and enjoying scenic overlooks.

In Grants, nicknamed "Uranium Capital of the World," you'll find the New Mexico Mining Museum. In 1950 a shepherd named Paddy Martinez found an odd yellow rock nearby that turned out to be from the largest uranium concentration in the world. A 30,000-pound drill bit is displayed outside the museum and is made up of 19 cylinders of varying sizes all edged with rows of dragonlike teeth, which drilled a 10-foot diameter shaft 2,234 feet.

Route 66 continues west toward Gallup through some of the most magnificent landscape anywhere. Tall mesas with long, oddly configured red flanks parallel the road. Red Rock Park, which appeared in the 1940 film *The Grapes of Wrath*, offers picnic areas, RV camping and hiking on several short trails.

Just past Thoreau the road crosses the Continental Divide, and shortly rolls into Gallup, the "Adventure Capital of New Mexico." Route 66 winds back and forth across I-40 another two-dozen miles, crossing into Arizona at Lupton. The Copper State, with some 385 miles of Route 66, offers travelers more natural treasures than any other state, among them Petrified Forest, Painted Desert, Sunset Crater Volcano, Meteor Crater and Grand Canyon.

Today, where you can't drive old Route 66 you travel I-40. But the new route also showcases some spectacular scenery, such as the stretch between Lupton and Holbrook, where you pass Petrified Forest and Painted Desert. Painted Desert's breathtaking landscape was sculpted by erosion to reveal fossils within the multicolored layers of stone.

President Theodore Roosevelt established Petrified Forest National Monument in 1906. In 1932, 53,200



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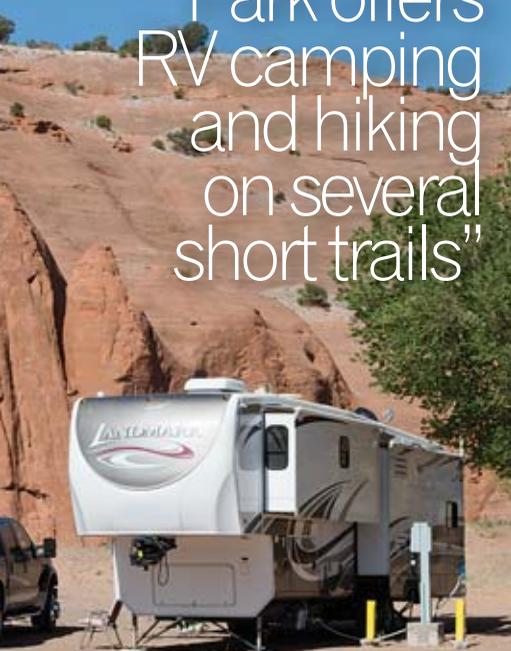
Graceful Agate Bridge spans 40 feet over a dry wash (left) and multihued jasper (right) sparkles inside a petrified log at Petrified Forest National Park near Holbrook, Arizona. The park is best known for Late Triassic fossils, covers about 146 square miles and parallels U.S. Route 66.

acres of the Painted Desert were bought and added, and 30 years later Congress designated the monument as a national park. In 1970, 50,000 acres of the park became one of the National Park System's first wilderness areas.

Today you can follow a 28-mile route through the park which offers numerous overlooks for stunning, high-up views of the colorful mesas, buttes and badlands spread below and stretching for miles.

Continue into a surreal landscape

“Red Rock Park offers RV camping and hiking on several short trails”



Red Rock Park near Gallup, New Mexico, has RV sites with electrical and water hook-ups.

of cone-shaped hills, dried-up streambeds snaking among the hills and low peaks rising from brownstone swirls. Splintered rounds of multi-colored petrified wood protrude from gritty hillsides, and tree trunks lie broken into huge chunks, resembling the plated spines of dinosaurs.

Holbrook, ahead, has a number of attractions, including International Petrified Forest, Dinosaur Park and Museum of the Americas, Rainbow Rock Shop, Route 66 icon Wigwam Motel with 15 teepee-style units, and Joe & Aggie's 1943 Café.

Continue along the interstate to Exit 257 and follow the old alignment a short distance to Kinsley and Second streets, where you can get out of your rig and be "Standin' on the Corner in Winslow, Arizona." Ahead (Exit 233), take the short side trip to Meteor Crater National Landmark, the best-preserved meteoric crater on the planet. Created 50,000 years ago, it measures nearly a mile across and 550 feet deep. Guided trips take visitors into the moonscape crater, which was used to train Apollo astronauts.

Drive on, but "Don't forget Winona." Here the old route pulls significantly away from the interstate and heads north toward Flagstaff, leaving behind the desert for cooler temperatures and pine-studded hills.

Busy Flagstaff has numerous attractions, among them "America's Mountain Garden" at the 200-acre Arboretum; the Pioneer Museum; Museum of Northern Arizona; and the Riordan Mansion State Historic Park.

Highlights of our visit included a

motorcycle ride a dozen miles north of Flagstaff to Wupatki and Sunset Crater Volcano national monuments. You can, of course, drive your pickup, but Peter and Mickey Fischer of EagleRider Rental Shop offer a more unusual experience: a ride to the monuments through these picturesque hills on a Harley. (Flagstaff location, call 928-637-6575; U.S. rental and tour information, 888-900-9901.)

Our last stop was at Flagstaff's newest outdoor attraction, Flagstaff Extreme, where visitors "play in the trees." The adventure course includes 72 bridges, swings, slides, nets, zip-lines and other "elements" suspended between sturdy ponderosas 15 to 60 feet high, for several levels of difficulty (the full adult course takes about three hours). Since you're safely fastened into a harness and observed by safety patrollers and rescue guides on the ground, getting hurt seems unlikely. Anyway, it's a lot more thrilling than scary. Call 888-259-0125 for information and reservations. 📞

For Part I in the Route 66 series, see the January 2013 issue; Part II is in the March 2013 issue.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

**New Mexico Route 66 Association**  
505-831-6317, www.rt66nm.org

**Arizona Route 66 Association**  
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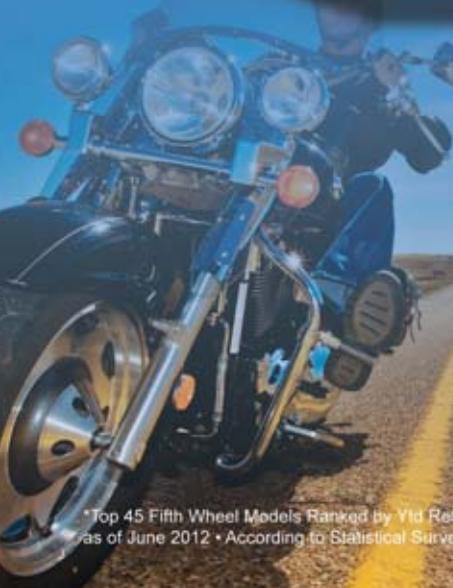
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# INSIDE ECOTEC3

The next generation Silverado/Sierra also gets an all-new line of engines with old- and new-school technology



**W**hen the next generation of General Motors' full-size pickups reaches dealers this year, shoppers should be aware of the advanced technologies that will be standard on the three new engines available in the half-ton Sierra and Silverado 1500 models. Some of these features may have an impact on the ownership experience.

The engines are members of the new Gen V small-block family that will be marketed under the EcoTec3 brand. Seasoned GM owners will certainly feel comfortable with the three engine displacements and cylinder-block configurations: 6.2-liter V-8, 5.3-liter V-8 and 4.3-liter V-6. The 4.8-liter V-8 is no longer an option.

At this writing, GM had not yet released horsepower or torque numbers, but officials promised that the engines are "specifically designed for the way customers use trucks in the real world."

One GM official was quoted as saying that torque from the 6.2-liter

engine will "pretty much make people forget about the big-block."

Aside from more power, GM is also promising better fuel economy and continued dependability and low cost of ownership.

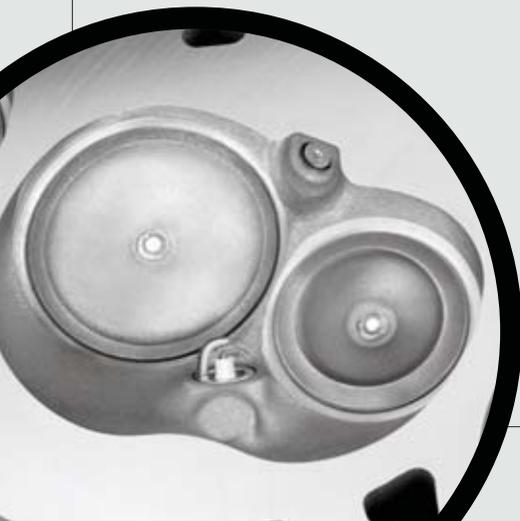
For the first time since the late '90s, all the engines in the half-ton trucks will be from the same powertrain family. In the previous years, the V-8 engines were based on the Gen III and IV LS architecture introduced to the truck line in 1999, while the V-6 traced its design roots back to the original first-generation small-block family. Now all three have nearly identical cylinder-head designs and features. In essence, the new 4.3-liter is a Gen V V-8 with the back two cylinders chopped off.

GM's strategy in designing the Gen V line of engines is to throw as much technology as possible at a very simple yet venerable overhead-valve design. What the EcoTec3 lacks in exotic features normally associated with

advanced high-tech engines — such as dual overhead cams and turbocharging — it more than makes up with precise combustion control using a variety of conventional and new hardware, including direct fuel injection.

Staying with a single-cam-in-block foundation and cylinder heads with two valves per cylinder has clear advantages for a truck application. There are fewer moving parts, so fewer chances of breakage or failure. Assembly and repair costs are cheaper. Other advantages include weight savings and packaging.

The Gen V small-block carries over only a handful of small parts, like starter bolts, from the previous generation. Many dimensions carry over; however, all of the components are considerably redesigned to support the features that help deliver the "advanced combustion system" that GM engineers developed through thousands of hours using computer



**Engineers used powerful computers to model and analyze combustion-chamber designs, including different locations for the direct-injection nozzle and the spark plug.**



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**INSIDE ECOTEC3**

design and simulation tools.

After all the analysis, engineers kept the robust displacements to provide torque and power, then expanded Active Fuel Management (AFM) to all engines. AFM is GM's cylinder deactivation system that shuts down four cylinders in the V-8s and two cylinders in the V-6 to improve fuel economy. The cylinders are deactivated only during cruising and light-load conditions, but engineers say they have improved the system so it operates longer.

The "advanced combustion system" is really an optimization of old- and new-school thinking. Working with the traditional two-valve-per-cylinder configuration, engineers added direct injection. Under very high pressure — about 2,000 psi, compared with the 55-60 psi in a conventional EFI engine — fuel is injected directly into the combustion chamber. Direct injection helps cool the piston crown, so higher compression ratios can be applied. The 6.2-liter engine boasts an 11.5:1 compression ratio while the other two engines are at 11.0:1. GM will recommend premium fuel for the 6.2-liter engine but says it can run on regular fuel, which is recommended for the other two engines.

Engineers then focused on designing the cylinder head ports to generate the type of airflow into the cylinder that complements direct injection. Next was locating the spark plug to promote optimum combustion and reduce knock. In all, more than 100 different combustion models were evaluated before engineers



**All EcoTec3 engines feature direct injection, which requires piston topography with a distinct design that promotes optimum combustion.**

settled on a system that worked with all three engines.

To take full advantage of the optimized combustion, engineers expanded the capability of the variable valve timing. Using a new phaser, the cam timing can be advanced or retarded with "62 degrees of authority." That's an additional 10 degrees more than the previous truck engines. By adjusting the cam timing according to load and rpm, engineers can manipulate the torque curve to boost low-end grunt or improve midrange power, as needed.

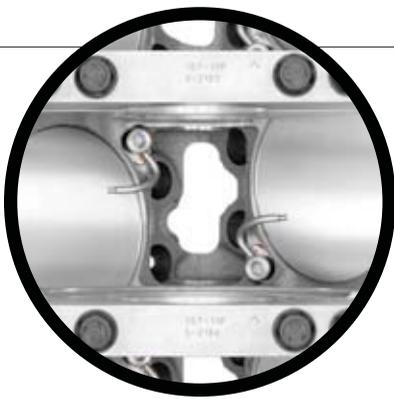
The cam phasing, direct injection and other advanced features require an extremely sophisticated engine-management system. Engineers say the ECU computer codes will be very difficult for the aftermarket to crack, and even if they do find a way to recalibrate the fuel and spark settings, there won't be much performance leeway to improve upon.

Another torque-improving feature on the EcoTec3 is the intake manifold. With the long, curved runners, airflow gets a boost at low rpm into the cylinder for a few more lb-ft of twisting power.

All three engines will be constructed with aluminum cylinder blocks and heads. Some engines in the previous generation had cast-iron blocks, but GM has made considerable investment in foundries to support an all-alloy lineup. Truck owners should have few concerns over durability or toughness. The blocks feature cast-in-place liners, nodular iron main caps (previous engines had powder metal) and new water jackets that support longer and larger head bolts. There are also provisions for oil squirters under the pistons to improve cooling.

The V-6 block will have a balance shaft in the block, just above the camshaft, to counter the vibrations inherent in a 90-degree V-engine configuration with an odd number of cylinders on each bank.

Inside the blocks, GM utilizes



Piston-cooling oil jets are standard on the new truck engines.

forged steel crankshafts, polymer-coated bearings, eutectic alloy pistons and connecting rods made from high-strength forgings.

The EcoTec3 engines will have higher-than-normal oil capacities. The V-6 requires 6 quarts while the V-8s have 8 quarts. There's also an oil-level sensor in the truck's diagnostics. GM engineers say the increased capacity will help protect customers whose vehicles go up to 10,000 miles between changes and don't realize that the oil level has dropped, even though the oil quality is still adequate. Other advantages of a larger sump include cooler and cleaner oil to go along with improved engine longevity.

The truck engines were developed alongside the 6.2-liter LT1 engine that powers the 2014 C7 Corvette. The 6.2-liter truck and Vette engines share many similar parts, but tuning controls are different. The Vette has a box-style intake manifold with shorter intake runners and also low-restriction exhaust manifolds for better top-end performance. The Vette can also be ordered with a dry-sump oiling system.

Bottom line for the Sierra and Silverado consumer is that the EcoTec3 was designed with truck performance in mind. All of the industry is moving toward consolidating car and truck powertrain platforms, when possible. Even though the Corvette shares the same basic architecture as the EcoTec3 trio, the production numbers favor the truck engines, so durability and performance can coexist in the same platform. 🚗

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## JTB POWER SOLUTION CAN ADD 20 AMPS TO ANY RV

**R**Vs are becoming more power thirsty every year. Not that long ago 30-amp circuits were more than enough to power all the electrical needs of most RVs. But as RV manufacturers add air conditioners, fireplaces, convection ovens, washers/dryers and larger, home-style refrigerators, the demand for 50-amp power (or greater) increases. Many RV parks are not equipped to keep up with power demands — especially on hot days when everyone is running air conditioners — because their circuits were

not designed for power-hungry RVs. JTB Power Solution is a simple way to add 20 amps to any RV, whether equipped with 30- or 50-amp service. In a nutshell, you can create 50 amps with 30-amp park service just by employing the JTB system and the existing 20-amp GFCI at the power post — without tripping a breaker.

Over the years, many RV owners have inquired whether it's possible to install an additional air conditioner to an existing 30-amp service or convert the RV from 30- to a 50-amp service.

Due to the high costs of parts and labor, the conversion was usually not a feasible option. The JTB Power Solution requires a fraction of the time to install, and is a much more affordable alternative to adding increased power.

In the past, Y adapters were marketed to supposedly increase load capability only to disappoint users by tripping the GFCI, which almost all parks have installed for safety and to meet code. JTB designed its products to solve this problem within the PC board and to eliminate cross phase as well.

JTB uniquely configures available power at the hookup by utilizing the 20-amp GFCI. Keep in mind that once the JTB cord is plugged in to the GFCI power source, it switches from 30- to 50-amp power automatically.

The JTB comes complete with a steel box that houses the circuit board with an attached load center; a 30-foot, 30-amp power cord; a 30-to-20-amp adapter; two rolls of No. 10 Romex; an installation hardware kit and a step-by-step instruction manual. JTB allows you to manage and boost the circuit of your choice: a second air conditioner, the microwave, fireplace or an electric water heater.

The complete JTB kit includes all of the wiring and hardware needed for installation. A helpful, step-by-step instruction manual will direct installers from beginning to end.



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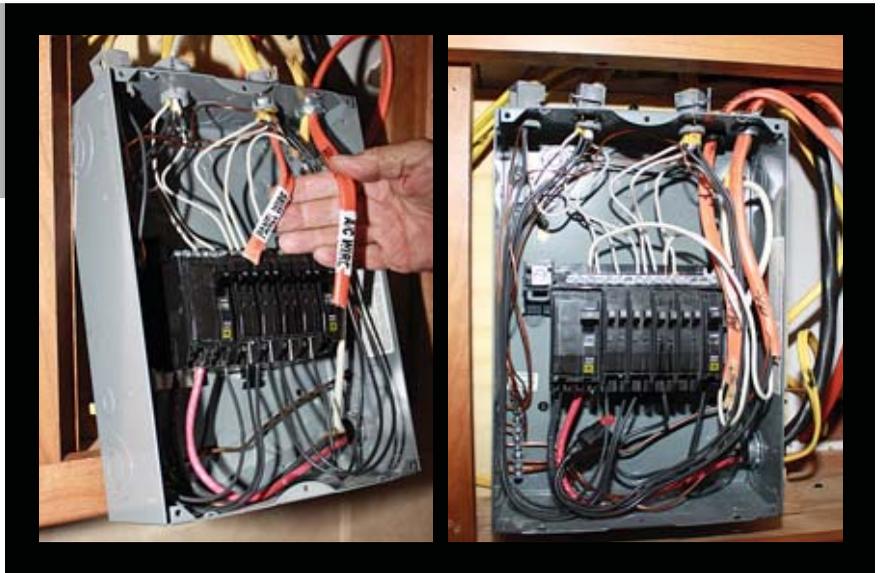


# JTB POWER SOLUTION

JTB Power Solution labeled both sets of Romex in the kit, helping to take the guesswork out of the connection process inside the main distribution panel of the RV.

For the evaluation of the JTB Power Solution we opted to use the second air conditioner as the circuit of choice. The owner of the RV used for the installation often camps in hot weather and has experienced a lack of power on several occasions when using 30-amp service.

Installation time on the JTB consumed 90 minutes, largely due to the inaccessibility of the main distribution panel. Feeding the pair of 10-gauge Romex cables to the main panel proved to be a challenge but, by contrast, installing the JTB unit and the power cord was relatively easy. The directions are clear and easy to understand and follow. An installation video is also available on the company's website.



The interior of the main distribution panel in the test RV was large enough to allow easy connection of the Romex, but it's likely that a small distribution panel would challenge even the smallest of hands. The Romex cables and the PC board are marked for a "plug and play"

installation. The wires will need to be cut to length, stripped and installed at the pre-marked locations.

There are several ways of attaching the JTB 30-amp power cord so that it can exit the RV without leaving an exterior compartment door open. A twist-lock



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Model 2185 shown in Rain Forest





power inlet can be installed next to the existing power cord for convenience and clean looks, or a simple cable hatch can be installed in a baggage door or in a wall next to a compartment. The cable hatch installation with the power cord attached

directly to the JTB was the option we chose for this project because it was the most simple and effective.

When calculating the demands of the circuit you want to use for the JTB system there are two simple mathematical equations: watts

(Above left) Using an existing access hole that is located under the floor in the bedroom, we were able to run both Romex wires up to the distribution panel. (Above right) This smaller box houses the 20-amp breaker for the 30-foot power cord. Make sure that the cord is clamped securely in place.

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The circuit board is clearly marked for easy installation of the A/C and Panel Wire. Simply strip the Romex wires, insert into the proper location and tighten the screws to secure into place.

divided by volts equal amps, or amps multiplied by volts equal watts. Most appliances have at least one rating listed on the labeling.

We tested the capabilities of the JTB system at a state park with 30-amp service and a GFCI. With only the refrigerator on, we measured 115 volts

AC. We turned on the water heater, both air conditioners, the fireplace, and a parabolic dish heater all the while carefully watching a high-quality plug-in digital meter for low voltage; refrain from using a cheap voltmeter to monitor the system. With all of these appliances running, the voltage only

dropped to 108. We measured current draw using a Fluke clamp-on meter and noted the total load at the time of the test at 48.8 amps. After 30 minutes, it did not trip any breaker, verifying the effectiveness of the JTB Power Solution (kit number 2010-100). Camping World's Club price is \$799 and the JTB

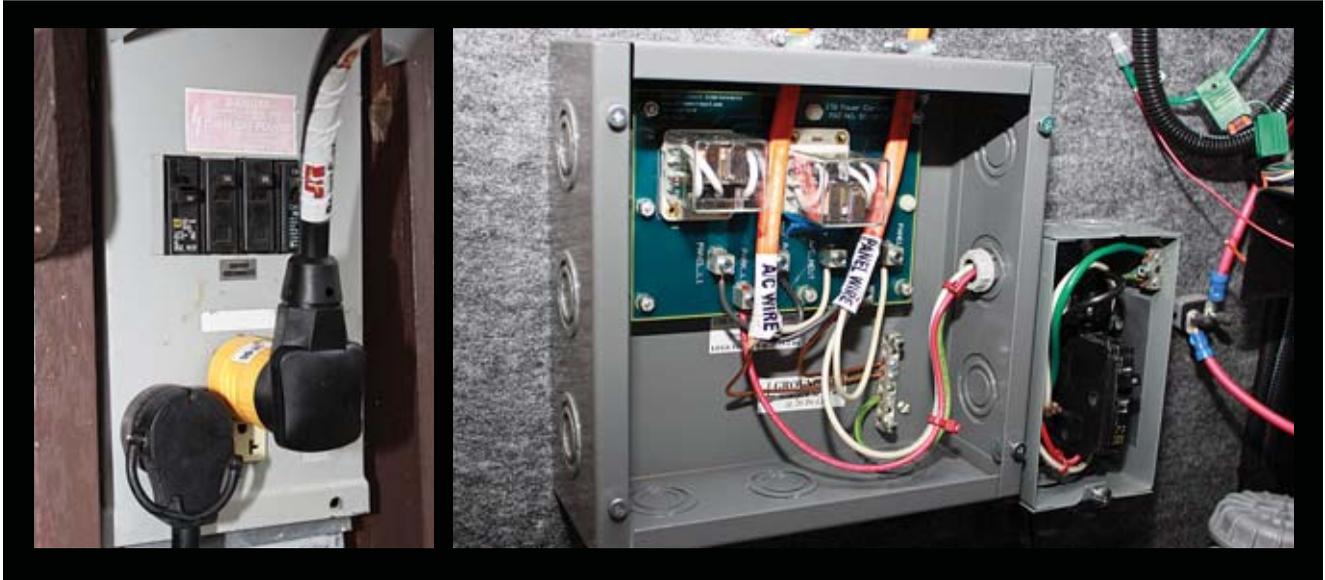
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ahead and run the hair dryer while heating coffee in the microwave and running both air conditioners — JTB has you covered. 🚐

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(Above left) The JTB power cord with adapter is plugged into the GFCI, along with the 30-amp power cord from the RV. (Above right) The JTB is mounted to a solid, vertical surface in a location close to the cable hatch exit for the JTB power cord. This gives the maximum amount of footage between the RV and the campground power.



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# A BRIGHTER IDEA

WHEN A TOW VEHICLE'S HEADLIGHTS LOSE SOME OF THEIR PUNCH, STEP UP TO SILVERSTAR BULBS FOR IMPROVED NIGHT VISION AND SAFETY

It's late at night, you're towing over an unfamiliar stretch of two-lane blacktop toward a new campground, and your nerves are on edge because the headlights just don't seem to be lighting up the highway like they should.

You aren't alone. Many RVers face the same situation when they hit the road and find themselves driving after dark.

Some drivers chalk up not being able to see the road as a result of tired

eyes, which is probably true. But that may not be the primary cause.

Reduced night vision can actually be the result of two factors: the natural aging of the eyes that brings a reduction in acuity of vision, and the natural aging of vehicle headlights that reduces their effectiveness.

There isn't a lot we can do about improving the night vision of our aging eyes. The rods and cones that process light into electrical signals allowing our



brain to "see" slow down and lose their efficiency with age.

In fact, studies show a 50-year-old's eyes have about half the night-vision acuity of a 20-year-old.

But there is something we can do about aging headlights — replace the bulbs. An even better fix is not only replacing the OEM bulbs but also

Replacing headlight bulbs on most tow vehicles is an easy job. But on some makes/models, such as the late-model GMC Sierra 1500 pickups, the grille has to be removed along with the headlight assemblies. Bulb swap is almost too easy. Bayonet-type mount takes just seconds to switch out bulbs. High- and low-beam bulbs are slightly different and are not interchangeable.





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**STOCK GM BULBS**

LOW-BEAM



HIGH-BEAM



**SYLVANIA BULBS**

LOW-BEAM



HIGH-BEAM



Sylvania's low-beam pattern on the GMC Sierra is wider and cleaner than the OEM bulbs, improving roadside and distance visibility without being offensive to drivers in oncoming vehicles. Distant signs and the sides of the road are well lit with Sylvania's high-beam ULTRA bulbs. The light is also whiter, which significantly improves visual acuity at night.

upgrading them with brighter, more efficient bulbs.

I recently upgraded a 2011 GMC Sierra's high- and low-beam bulbs by switching to higher-performance Sylvania SilverStar ULTRA headlights.

SilverStar bulbs are available at most auto parts stores and automotive retail outlets. The ULTRAs cost a little more than standard replacement bulbs, but they produce a much whiter, brighter and wider beam that significantly improves the view down those dark roads. They are also 50-state legal, unlike HID (high-intensity discharge lamps).

Changing headlight bulbs is easy on most pickups and SUVs, typically requiring only a simple twist-and-turn to remove/replace.

Getting to the bulbs can be a challenge on some newer trucks and SUVs. For example, late-model GMCs require the grille and headlight assembly be removed to get at the bulbs. Check your tow vehicle to see

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how easy (or difficult) it is to change bulbs. If it appears difficult, have an auto body shop or dealer do the work.

Either way, the time and money spent on the SilverStar ULTRA bulb upgrade is a good investment for anyone who drives a lot after dark — especially if towing a trailer or traveling country roads.

When brights are needed the SilverStar bulbs project the light considerably farther down the road than the stock headlight bulbs. The improvement in light output is even greater on older vehicles.

According to Sylvania, the ULTRAS add 40 to 50 percent better distance and side-to-side coverage than the worn halogens found on pickups that are several years old.

So, if improving your night vision — and reducing the stress of not being able to see as well down the road as you'd like sounds like a good plan — consider upgrading those headlight bulbs.



## EYE SMART

Here are some tips to improve your night-driving vision:

- Protect eyes in the daylight. Daytime glare is particularly tiring to the eyes. Keep them shaded by wearing a hat and polarized and UV-protective sunglasses. Daytime eye protection helps you see better at night.
- Dim the console/dash lights to the lowest setting where you can still read gauges.
- Keep the windshields spotlessly clean — inside and out.
- Install a set of high-intensity HID fog and driving lights on your truck. Laws vary from state to state, so be sure to verify what types of auxiliary lighting equipment is legal in your area, as well as when it's legal to use it.
- Properly aim headlights. Misaligned headlights can blind oncoming drivers and reduce your ability to see the road.
- Wear night-vision glasses. Lenses with wavefront diagnostic technology, like those from iZon, Tag Heuer and Zeiss, can significantly sharpen night vision while reducing halos, starbursts, glare and other distracting visual aberrations.
- Don't smoke in the vehicle because smoke is an eye irritant. Nicotine and other impurities in cigarette and cigar smoke build up on the inside of the windows, compounding night-vision issues.
- Keep the headlights clean: That includes removing the "fog" that forms over older headlight housings by using a headlight restoration kit.
- Don't drive when tired. Being overtired and fatigued reduces the ability to focus the eyes. Fatigue also slows reaction time and level of concentration. 🚗

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# Gateway to Adventure

Heartland's Gateway 3200 RS fifth-wheel and Ford F-350 Lariat Platinum Crew Cab deliver the goods



**H**earthland has gone all out on its new Gateway 3200 RS fifth-wheel. From the handsome exterior styling to the tasteful interior design and functionality, to its sweet-riding suspension and smart body treatments, the nearly 38-foot-long fiver brims with features that many RVs in a similar price range may not offer. Most surprising is that many of the features you might think are options are actually standard equipment.

Our initial walk around of the 3200 RS revealed a body-match painted front cap that not only looked great integrated into the side walls with stylish graphics, but also provided an aerodynamic leading edge, which is designed to lessen the impact of a large frontal area when towing. A matching cover hiding the king-pin box complements

the front cap, and is designed to allow for an 88-degree profile when turning sharply and towed by a shortbed pickup. This prevents cap-to-cab contact in just about any circumstance, without the need for a slider hitch; caution should still be taken when jackknifing the trailer into a spot.

The standard high-gloss side walls

Directly aft of the stove and contained in the same streetside slide is a generous pantry, 8-cubic-foot refrigerator/freezer, and the entertainment components that include a 5,000-Btu fireplace, 40-inch flat-screen LED TV and a Bluetooth-equipped sound system that is located in the top left cabinet.





are striking and covered in attractive graphics and a sandy color that Heartland calls Taupe. Smoked frameless windows all around offer more viewing space, give the rig an automotive look and are tipped out from the bottom for venting while shedding rain. The extended gutter spouts are a nice touch that kept water off the side of the trailer and should keep potential black streaks from forming as well. A pair of marine-grade speakers perched just above the forward curbside baggage door put out excellent sound quality, keeping occupants entertained while outside.

Every upward lifting storage door on the rig features slam-latch locking closures, and instead of those pesky clips, each could be held open with magnetic holdbacks, which are much more convenient since they do not require two hands

to lock the door open. We were especially happy with the main pass-through storage space, as it is voluminous, well lit, all the plumbing is hidden, tools are attached to the wall and it features a “pet connect” (which also doubled as a tie down) on the curbside to which a leash could be easily attached.

Hauling the 3200 RS to camp was a pleasure. We experienced smooth riding behavior from the trailer while on the road, which no doubt is due to the TrailAir Equa-Flex suspension system, the 16-inch radial tires and the arrow-straight alignment setup created by the standard Correct Track system now available on all Heartland Gateway fifth-wheels. The 2013 Ford F-350 certainly had something to do with it, too. It may have a rougher ride than a half-ton when unloaded, but when the Gateway was hooked up, the single-rear-wheel Crew Cab 1-ton we tested rode smooth and level on all road surfaces. We always felt in control of the load, and braking was sure and in-line.

Power from the 6.7-liter OHV turbo-diesel came on strong and allowed us to get the trailer up to highway speeds in a respectable amount of time. Even better, cruising was easy, as we had no trouble staying at 55 MPH in fifth gear with the trailer in tow without having to floor the gas pedal. A downshift to third and a moderate amount of pressure on the accelerator was all that was needed to coax the combo up most hills.

This truck was equipped with the Platinum Package which, aside from some great-looking exterior enhancements, also provides standard features such as navigation, rear-view camera, power telescoping mirrors — all making the truck easier to use for towing. Interior comfort is exceptional, especially the firm and supportive seating. General visibility is good due to the Ford’s large expanses of glass and outstanding towing mirrors, although the headrests on the rear seats did get in the way of our line of sight during trailer hookup; having a buddy assist during this operation was a must.

Setting up the fifth-wheel in camp was a breeze using the standard electric stabilizer jacks at all four corners, and the snap-jack pins and electric

## SPECIFICATIONS

### 2013 Heartland RV Gateway 3200 RS

Exterior Length	37' 11"
Exterior Width	8' 6"
Exterior Height (with A/C)	13' 2"
Interior Width	8'
Interior Height	8' 6"
Construction	3-inch laminated, aluminum trussed, one-piece floor; 2-inch laminated six-layer, aluminum-framed side walls; aluminum-trussed, fully walkable roof
Freshwater Cap.	57 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	80 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	40 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	10 gal.
Refrigerator	8 cu. ft.
Furnace	35,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	(2) 15,000/13,500 Btu
Converter	50 amp
Battery	single 12-volt
Tires	ST235/80R16E
Suspension	TrailAir Equa-Flex
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no cargo)	11,720 lbs.
Hitch Weight	2,360 lbs.
Axle Weight	(2) 9,360 lbs.
GVWR	14,000 lbs.
GAWR	(2) 6,000 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Capacity	2,280 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$57,750
MSRP, as tested	\$59,135
Basic Warranty	1-year (all inclusive), 2- to 3-year (most appliances)

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### 2013 Ford F-350 4x4 SRW Crew Cab

MPG	Solo: 17.1; Towing: 8.8
0-60 mph, towing	21.1 sec.
40-60 mph, towing	11.0 sec.
Engine	6.7L V-8 OHV turbocharged diesel
Horsepower	400 @ 2,800 rpm
Torque	800 @ 1,600 rpm
Transmission	TorqShift 6-speed automatic
Axle Ratio	3.55:1
Fuel Cap.	26 gal.
Tires	LT275/65R20 E
Suspension	Front: Mono beam w/coil springs, shocks, stabilizer bar; Rear: Hotchkiss live axle, leaf springs, staggered shocks, stabilizer bar
Brakes	Four-wheel vented disc, ABS
Tow Rating	(conventional) 14,000 lbs.; (fifth-wheel) 15,900 lbs.
GVWR	11,500 lbs.
GCWR	23,500 lbs.
Weight as Tested	8,240 lbs.
Length	20' 7"
Wheelbase	156"
MSRP, base	\$53,655
MSRP, as tested	\$65,255
Basic Warranty	3-year bumper-to-bumper; 5-year powertrain

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jacks up front for easy leveling. On the rear wall (a real fiberglass laminated, insulated wall, by the way, not a molded cap) is a 50-amp connector to which we hooked up camp power. Extra nice was the light next to the dump area so we could see what we were doing during pre-dawn departures. Even better was Gateway's sealed Universal Docking Center tucked away inside a streetside exterior storage compartment. Here, all the hookup accessories such as outside shower, city water, freshwater fill, black-tank flush and tank pulls are located. The Docking Center is lit as well.

Once inside the Gateway 3200 RS, the first thing we noticed was the command center at the entryway. From there we could extend the slideouts and turn on all the power systems such as water pump and set the thermostats for the furnaces, and the dual air-conditioning units. But prior to moving the slides out, we needed to unbuckle the mobile island that must be strapped down for transit. Although it features locking casters to keep it in place once positioned in the desired location when camped, it needs to be tied down with supplied straps to small D-rings on the floor when the fifth-wheel is in motion. The mobile island features a split-level solid-surface countertop with plenty (continued on page 54)

**A hutch with dual stainless-steel sinks and high-arched faucet with pull-out sprayer is separated from the cooking area. The multitiered kitchen island rolls on locking casters.**





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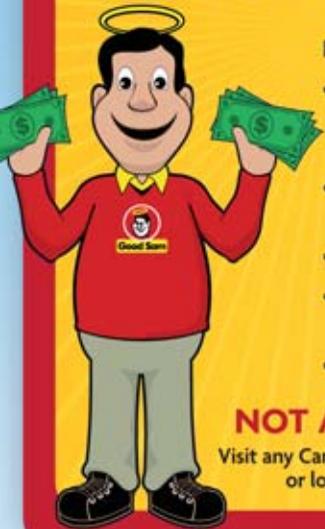
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(continued from page 50) of room for social activity and loads of storage inside, as well as a compartment with a trash receptacle on one end and a wine-bottle storage section on the other end. This mobile island is one of the key features of the Gateway 3200 RS interior.

With the two living area slides fully extended (the third is in the bedroom), we had plenty of room to relax and enjoy the comforts and amenities the Gateway has to offer. These begin with the accommodating under-counter-mounted dual stainless sinks with a high-arched faucet and a pull-out sprayer. This self-contained sink area is well lit and features an electrical outlet.

Separated from the kitchen cabinet is the cooking area, which offers a 22-inch oven, three-burner stovetop and microwave, as well as some counter space. An electrical outlet is also positioned just above the counter making the cooking area next to the stovetop a perfect spot for a toaster. LED lights are positioned all around the galley area for general



**(Left)** Staircase leading to the bathroom and bedroom offer storage drawers and hand rail, in addition to switches (lower right) to turn on interior lights while standing outside the trailer. **(Right)** Close-up detail of decorative wood carving on kitchen sink hutch.



illumination of the working space.

Directly aft of the stove is a generously sized and conveniently placed pantry, and just beyond that, the 8-cubic-foot refrigerator freezer that held enough to feed us for a week. The entertainment components and refrigerator are incorporated into the same

streetside slide as the cooking area.

Contained in the entertainment section is a 5,000-Btu fireplace that is hinged on one side and opens to reveal hidden storage behind it and a drawer above it that can be used to hold all your games and movies for the 40-inch flat-screen LED TV that is mounted above that. The

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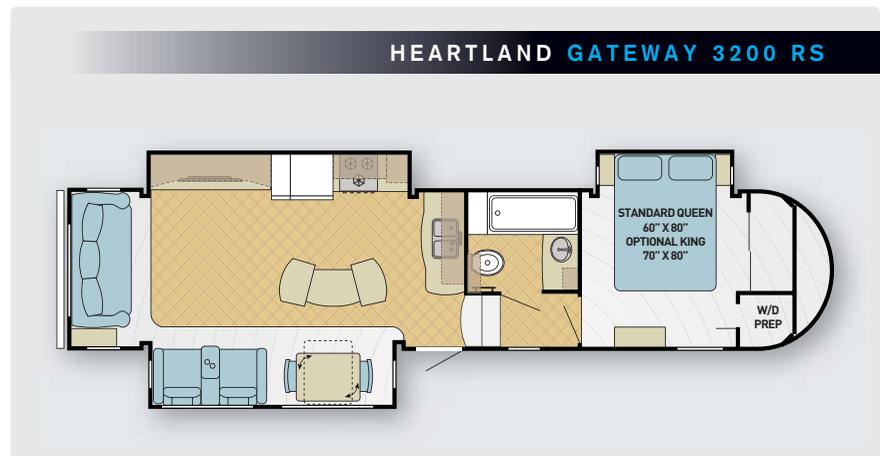
\*RV SATELLITE KIT OFFER: Courtesy of Direct Sat TV with new residential home service activation and purchase of CHOICE Package (\$60.99/mo.) or above. Includes satellite dish, travel tripod and 50' of coaxial cable. HD dish will incur additional fees. Tripod for HD dish not available. Programming and pricing may vary for service in your RV. For service in RV, customer will receive NY Distant Network Signal, based on geographical location. LA Distant Network is available upon request and requires special hardware, which will incur additional fees. DNS waiver required.  
\*\*INSTALLATION: Standard professional home installation is up to 4 rooms only. Custom installation extra. \*\*24-MO. LEASE AGREEMENT: EARLY CANCELLATION WILL RESULT IN A FEE OF \$20/MONTH FOR EACH REMAINING MONTH. Must maintain 24 consecutive months of your DIRECTV programming package. DVR service \$7/mo. required for DVR and HD DVR lease. HD Access fee \$10/mo. required for HD Receiver and HD DVR. No lease fee for only 1 receiver. Lease fee for first 2 receivers \$6/mo.; additional receiver leases \$6/mo. each. NON-ACTIVATION CHARGE OF \$150 PER RECEIVER MAY APPLY. ALL EQUIPMENT IS LEASED AND MUST BE RETURNED TO DIRECTV UPON CANCELLATION, OR UNRETURNED EQUIPMENT FEES APPLY. VISIT directv.com OR CALL 1-800-DIRECTV FOR DETAILS. Local channels eligibility based on service address. Not all networks available in all markets. Programming, pricing, terms and conditions subject to change at any time. Pricing residential. Taxes not included. Receipt of DIRECTV programming subject to DIRECTV Customer Agreement; copy provided at directv.com/legal and in order confirmation. DIRECTV and the Cyclone Design logo, FAMILY and CHOICE are trademarks of DIRECTV, Inc. All other trademarks and service marks are the property of their respective owners.

huge TV also tilts up from the bottom to reveal more hidden storage, including a safe for valuables. In the top left cabinet door is a Bluetooth-equipped sound system. Throughout this and all the other solid wood cabinets in the Gateway, we found real hardwood drawer fronts with full-extension roller bearing drawer glides, as well as hidden spring-loaded hinges on all the cabinet doors.

At the tail end of the trailer sit a pair of Lauren Ashley top stitch reclining leather sofas. Each comes standard with an air bed. One is in the rear under a picture window and it seats three. The other is positioned directly facing the TV on the curbside. Combined, they make a nice corner couch duet that seats five. They provided very comfortable lounging for watching TV, reading or just kicking back and chatting with visiting neighbors during our stay at the Ventura Ranch KOA in Southern California. Conveniently located nearby are electrical outlets that included USB ports for charging/powering devices such as iPads and other electronic equipment.

Just forward of the very comfy two-person couch on the curbside stand the Versa-Table Dinette and its two stylishly designed chairs. The dinette table has a storage drawer inside and an extension wing, and can be rotated to be positioned lengthwise or on end along the inside wall of the trailer. Chair rails around that section of the interior keep the walls from becoming nicked — a nice touch not often found.

Up the stairs from the main living room is a graciously sized and appointed bath that features a large shower with a flexible wand and tiled design on the stall walls. The skylight allows a 6-foot 2-inch person to stand tall inside. A porcelain toilet, large cabinet, roomy sink and big mirror make the bathroom seem almost residential. And air conditioning and heating registers regulate comfort in all seasons. Another



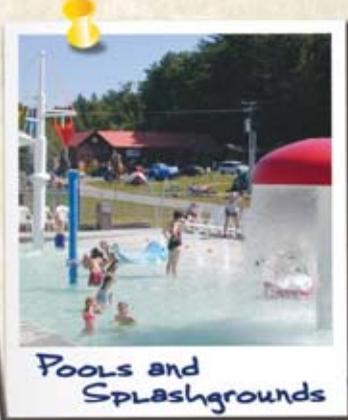
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nice feature of the Gateway is that at the foot of these stairs (near the entry door of the trailer) are a pair of light switches. These can be used to turn on the trailer's interior lights while standing outside before entering the fifth.

Behind a door just a step or two from the stairs is the master bedroom with a standard queen bed (a king is offered as an option), a chest of drawers affixed to the opposite wall, nightstands on either side of the bed with wardrobes above the nightstands, and a cabinet above the leather-bound headboard. The chest of drawers is about shoulder width, just wide enough to place a TV atop it; the TV prep connection is just above it.

The bed's pillow-top memory foam mattress is supremely comfortable and offers a darn good night's sleep. At the very far end of the bedroom is a wall-to-wall closet with mirrored doors on about two-thirds of its length and louvered doors on the curbside third.



(Left) The 2013 Ford F-350 offers masterful towing power and a cockpit designed to bring the controls within easy reach. (Right) Large and fully adjustable, heated and extendable towing mirrors give the driver a clear view of the fifth-wheel and traffic.

Behind the mirrored sliding doors there is enough room to hang clothing to last a couple of weeks, at least. Behind the louvered doors are hookups and room for a washer/dryer combo. We especially liked the fact that there were two thermostats to control the environmental system inside the Gateway, one in the main living area, and one

in the bedroom. And after setting the thermostat and getting comfortable, the bedroom is where the days with the 2013 Heartland Gateway 3200 RS ended — watching the sun go down through the nearly floor-to-ceiling window at the foot of the queen bed, book in hand, gathering a few last thoughts before turning in for the evening. 🚚

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# Act on Impulse

The latest Class C Itasca Impulse 31WP offers spaciousness and high-end features at a competitive price



**B**uying your family's first motorhome can often be an exhausting experience because, after wrapping your head around the oddities of coach classes (shouldn't A be the biggest, and C the smallest?), there's still the ratings game to comprehend — not to mention the complexities of capacities. To slide, or not to slide? These are only a few of the questions. You can spend weeks researching the various brands, floorplans and price points, but in the end, the best bet is to focus on the features you really need, and to buy from a reputable manufacturer.

When you're considering a family motorhome, what you really need is sleeping capacity — something a Class C motorhome has in spades. But beyond that, you'll want a choice of features to make your trip enjoyable, and build quality that will allow you to make good memories for many years

to come. That's where Winnebago Industries comes in. The best-recognized name in RVing, Winnebago has built a reputation on high-quality coaches at competitive price points. But what may come as somewhat of a surprise is that its upscale Itasca division also offers several affordable models, including the

Impulse 31WP Class C reviewed here.

Available on the venerable Ford E-350 or E-450 chassis, the Impulse is also offered with an optional Silver Package that includes upscale features such as stainless-steel wheel liners and a host of interior enhancements, plus the option of full-body paint (\$4,620) in your choice of Woodland Brown, Pewter, Black Mist, Sandstone or Vintage, the color scheme on our coach. And, of course, there are a slew of available options, which we'll point out over the course of this review.

The Impulse line consists of five floorplans from 24 to 31 feet, the latest of which is the 31WP. It features a fairly



**(From left):** Our test unit included optional Ultraleather cab seats and a faux wood dash appliqué that is part of the Silver package. Optional Brownstone interior with Coffee Glazed Vienna Maple Cabinetry looks good, is well-built and offers plenty of storage.

straightforward layout consisting of a large slideout in the living room that incorporates a 42-by-70-inch BenchMark dinette featuring innerspring cushions rather than foam with two belted positions, and a 40-by-60-inch sofa bed with three belted positions. This is worth noting, as we've tested many coaches that sleep eight, but paradoxically only have a couple of seatbelts in the living area.

Across from the slideout is a generously proportioned kitchen with plenty of counterspace, double-bowl stainless-steel sink with covers, three-burner range and a Norcold double-door refrigerator. In place of the standard microwave oven, our test unit was fitted with an optional microwave/convection oven for a very reasonable \$105 extra.

The amidships bath area consists of a porcelain toilet and lav streetside, and a large shower directly across on the curbside. We tend to prefer this layout rather than having everything in one room, as it allows more freedom for two people to get cleaned up. The bedroom is highlighted by a walk-around queen bed, and a large wardrobe slides out to make the area feel even more spacious. Our coach was resplendent in the optional Brownstone interior (\$415) featuring Coffee Glazed Vienna Maple Cabinetry, which is abundant and easy on the eyes.

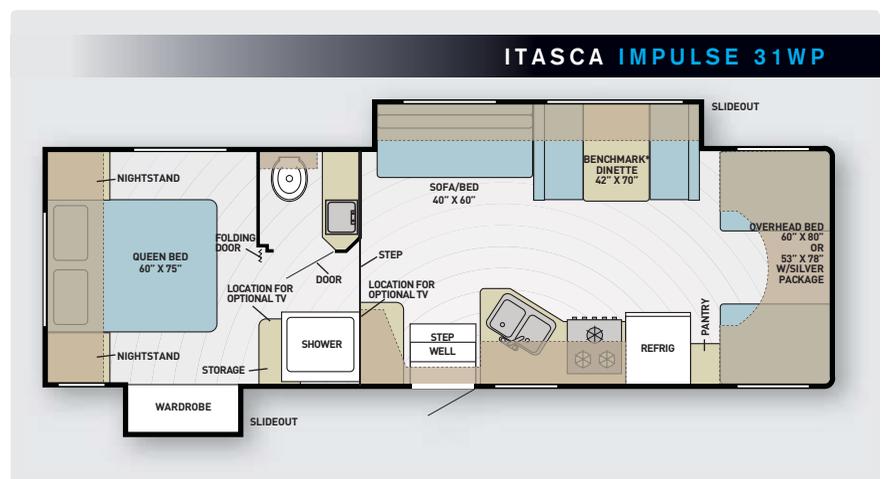
To test the new 31WP, we headed toward California's Mojave Desert. We climbed into the cab to find soft Ultraleather cab seats (\$595), as well as a touch-screen audio system with backup camera display (with sound) and

satellite radio (\$126). It's a reasonably comfortable place to spend time, but we aren't big fans of the faux wood dash applique. It looks more like hardened caramel than wood, and its glossy surface creates glare.

On the road, let's just say that the E-450 chassis' strong suit isn't driving prowess. The V-10 gas engine — located in a doghouse between the driver and front passenger — is loud. So loud, in fact, that when the transmission is in a lower gear during a moderate hill climb, we had to shout at each other to be heard. The coach's high center of gravity and long rear overhang conspire for handling that's less than precise — especially during the strong side winds common in the desert. The ride, however, was acceptable thanks to the optional auxiliary air springs (\$294), and to Winnebago's credit, there were almost no squeaks or rattles to be heard when

driving over highway expansion joints. This is no doubt due to Winnebago's SuperStructure design, which utilizes metal substructures in the side walls that create secure mounting points for the cabinets and appliances.

We arrived at our campsite in the late afternoon, and quickly deployed the powered patio awning with the touch of a button. We then retrieved some of our gear from the cavernous rear storage compartment, which offers convenient access from the rear and curbside of the coach. The area offers a center compartment with a drain plug to keep drinks on ice, and the cover doubles as a folding table. Thoughtful features, for sure, but we couldn't help but wonder how challenging it would be to retrieve the spare tire in the event of a flat. Some other exterior features we liked were the dual deep-cycle batteries on a pullout tray, the cleanly packaged



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exterior service center and the optional exterior wash station (\$119).

After dinner, we settled in to watch movies on the optional home-theater system (\$1,281). The system includes a 32-inch LCD TV, AM/FM receiver, DVD player, amplifier, speakers and subwoofer. The sound from the system was excellent, but we found the TV's location near the door to be awkward, and the remote only worked when sitting directly in front of the cabinet. Winnebago would do well to take a cue from residential home-theater installers and use an infrared remote that can control the system from anywhere in the coach.

Turning in for the night, we found that the wardrobe slideout has plenty of room for gear storage, and the combination of an optional 22-inch LCD TV (\$420), dual-glazed thermo-insulated windows (\$203) and MCD American Duo solar/blackout roller shades (part of the Silver Package) made the bedroom a great place to get some shuteye or just relax. We just wish the mattress was softer as it seemed overly firm to us — but this is a matter of personal preference.

Elsewhere, additional sleeping accommodations could be found on the 53-by-78-inch bed over the bunk, the dinette and the sofa bed. Our coach



Kitchen has plenty of cabinet space, a large double-door refrigerator and optional convection microwave. Dual sink covers, combined with a countertop extension, allow more than enough room for meal prep.

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was fitted with the optional Ultraleather Comfort Sofa/Sleeper (\$623), which uses an air mattress that requires either the AC-generator or shorepower to inflate.

With all of the options (including a 6-gallon water heater, \$497, and 300-watt inverter, \$441) the price of our test coach swelled to \$107,279, but you

could definitely save some money by not selecting some of the more expensive items, and still have a very comfortable family coach.

Overall, the Itasca Impulse is a good combination of creature comforts and plenty of space at a price that won't break the bank. And that's just what RV buyers want when making a purchase. 🚐

## SPECIFICATIONS



### PERFORMANCE

Fuel Economy	9.57 MPG
Acceleration	
0-60 MPH/40-60 MPH	19 sec./11 sec.

### CHASSIS

Model	Ford E-450
Engine	Ford 6.8-L V-10
SAE HP	305 @ 4,250 RPM
Torque	420 lb-ft @ 3,250 RPM
Transmission	TorqShift 5-speed automatic

Axle Ratio	4.56:1
Tires	LT 225/75R16 E
Wheelbase	220"
Brakes	4-wheel disc with ABS
Suspension, F/R	Twin I-Beam IFS, front stabilizer bar/live axle with leaf springs
Fuel Cap.	55 gal.
Warranty	3 years/36,000 miles

### COACH

Exterior Length	31' 8"
Exterior Width	8' 5.5"
Exterior Height	11' 11"
Interior Width	8'
Interior Height	6' 10"
Construction	Steel/aluminum framing, one-piece fiberglass roof, block foam insulation
Freshwater Cap.	40 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	41 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	40 gal.

Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	18 gal.
Air Conditioner	14,500 Btu
Furnace	30,000 Btu
Refrigerator	8 cu. ft.
Converter	45 amp
Battery	Group 31 (2)
AC Generator	4kW Cummins Onan MicroQuiet gas generator
MSRP	\$97,542
MSRP, as tested	\$107,279
Warranty	1 year/15,000-mile basic warranty

### WET WEIGHT

(Water and heater, Fuel, LP-gas tanks full; no supplies or passengers)

Front axle	4,280 lbs.
Rear axle	8,500 lbs.
Total	12,780 lbs.
Winnebago Industries	641-585-3535, www.goitasca.com

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GAWR, F/R	5,000/9,600 lbs.
GVWR/GCWR	14,500/22,000 lbs.
ROCCC	1,720 lbs.
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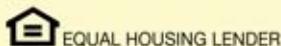
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# HALF-TON FUN

These fifth-wheel trailers may be lighter, but there's no sacrifice in comfort and amenities

**H**igh fuel prices and the skyscraping cost of  $\frac{3}{4}$ - and 1-ton pickups have created a growing demand for lightweight, easier-to-tow RVs. But not everyone wants a little trailer, which has led many RV builders to focus on smaller and lightweight fifth-wheels now more than ever. And the consumer stands to benefit from that trend. However, while many half-ton towable fifth-wheels might be smaller, that doesn't mean they aren't spacious and filled with great features; many offer niceties such as solid-surface countertops, leveling jacks and electric awnings. And almost every brand has a fifth-wheel designed for half-ton pickups that offers a slideout to expand the living space. Some even have two or three.

Keystone's Laredo Super Lite fifth-wheel line is a perfect example. The series tops out at 31 feet in length with a dry weight of 7,735 pounds, yet is available in two double-slide floorplans. "These fifth-wheels are extremely well-equipped,

attractive, offer great value and, of course, are towable by properly equipped half-ton trucks," explains Jim Mac, Keystone's communications manager.

Having made a name for itself in the travel trailer and truck camper markets, Livin' Lite Recreational Vehicles entered the fifth-wheel segment for the 2013 model year with the Mercury, an aluminum-and-composite fiver that will initially feature two 24-foot floorplans with dry weights of less than 4,500 pounds. "We expect the Mercury to prove to be something that changes the market a little bit in the true ultralight fifth-wheel category," says Livin' Lite President Scott Tuttle.

Mark Lucas, president of Forest River's Shasta division, says the company's new 100-inch wide-body Phoenix fifth-wheel in lengths of 27 to 34 feet is intended to deliver more livability in a smaller RV. "It's more cost-effective for the consumer, easier to tow and easier to park and they give up nothing," Lucas said.

More and more builders are coming to market with a half-ton towable fifth-wheel that offers many of the conveniences, features and luxuries of the larger, heavier fivers. Here's a guide to get you started.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MANUFACTURERS





AXIOM

### Axiom

The compact Axiom lightweight fifth-wheel built by Forks RV is aimed primarily at the Australian market, but is available through select dealers in the United States. The 7½-foot-wide mid-profile Axiom is offered in four 23- to 27-foot floorplans, each with a single sofa/dinette slideout. With a dry weight of 6,500 pounds, the aluminum-and-laminated fiberglass Axiom features an aerodynamic front cap, composite cabinets, LED lighting inside and out, thermopane windows and linoleum floors in the living area with carpeting in the upper deck — which is equipped with a queen bed. Base MSRP starts at \$42,000.

Forks RV, 574-825-7467,  
www.forksrv.com

### CrossRoads

CrossRoads RV has added a double-slideout 30-foot lightweight fifth-wheel to its 2013 Cruiser Aire lineup. The Cruiser Aire fiver, from this subsidiary of Forest River, has a walk-through queen-size bedroom with a 6-foot 6-inch ceiling. Five other fifth-wheel floorplans in lengths of 25 to 30 feet will also be available. The Cruiser Aire fiberglass-and-aluminum debut floorplan, with a 7,000-pound dry weight, is equipped with electric jacks, a 15,000-Btu air conditioner, 8-cubic-foot refrigerator, maple cabinets, 54-by-27-inch shower with a glass door and a midway island kitchen with a large amount of Formica countertop space. Base MSRP: \$29,995.

CrossRoads RV, 855-226-7496,  
www.crossroadsrv.com

(continued on page 68)

### Escape 5.0

Made entirely of hand-laid fiberglass in a two-piece mold, the lightweight, aerodynamic Escape 5.0 from Escape Trailer weighs approximately 2,650 pounds (dry) and offers a low center of gravity for increased road stability and a 3,500-pound-capacity independent suspension axle for reduced vibration and better handling while towing. Standards such as 15-inch tires (including the spare), LED marker lights, a 10-foot Fiesta awning and dual 5-gallon LP-gas cylinders dress up the exterior of this 19-foot 6-inch fifth-wheel.

Its compact kitchen still boasts a 4.3-cubic-foot three-way Dometic refrigerator, two-burner cooktop with power range hood, optional microwave and a countertop and sink roomy enough to get the job done. The fifth-wheel has a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 4,400 pounds, making it easily towed by half-ton pickups such as a GMC Sierra or Toyota Tundra, and even by some compact pickups with appropriate trailer weight ratings and proper equipment. Base MSRP: \$27,000. Escape Trailer Industries, 855-703-1650, www.escapetrailer.com



ESCAPE 5.0



CROSSROADS CRUISER AIRE

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# HALF-TON FUN

(continued from page 65)



HEARTLAND ELKRIDGE

## Heartland RV

Two new rear-living-room floorplans have been added to Heartland Recreational Vehicles' Elkrige Express fifth-wheel series for 2013. The 30-foot E27 and 31-foot E28 floorplans each have a single slideout and are among seven that the manufacturer is building for the new model year. With dry weights ranging from 7,205 to 9,250 pounds, the Elkrige Express is constructed with laminated fiberglass side walls on an aluminum frame and has an 88-degree turning angle. Features include heated storage with slam-lock doors, kingpin box covers, outside showers, Beauflor floors, solid-surface countertops, cherry cabinets with hidden hinges, 60-by-74-inch queen beds, full wardrobes, sofa air beds, porcelain toilets, dinette chairs with hidden storage and multiview TV centers. Base MSRP starts at about \$24,000.

Heartland RV, 877-262-8032, [www.heartlandrvs.com](http://www.heartlandrvs.com)

## Jayco

Dry weights range from 5,975 to 7,135 pounds in the Jayco Eagle HT line, with four available floorplans for 2013. Offered in 26- to 32-foot layouts, three have wardrobe slideouts to complement the living-room slide. The unusual Eagle HT 23.5RBS has a large rear bath with tub and shower to allow for more

bedroom space in the upper deck. A standard Glacier Package includes an R-29 insulation value in the main floor and R-27 in the roof in addition to triple insulation in the heated-and-enclosed underbelly. Countertops are solid-surface and cabinets have solid hardwood doors with screwed stiles. Base MSRPs begin at \$30,586.

Jayco Inc., 574-825-5861, [www.jayco.com](http://www.jayco.com)



## Keystone

With a dry weight of 7,735 pounds, the Laredo Super Lite 289SRE is equipped with a living-area slideout containing a sofa bed and booth dinette. A "Best in Class Package" included in all Laredo layouts includes an adjustable electric awning, LCD TV, electric rear stabilizer jacks, all-weather Glacier Package and crown molding. Standard features include a fully enclosed heated underbelly, pass-through lighted storage, residential-size cabinets, single-basin sink, two-door refrigerator, extra-wide dinette with storage below, raised-panel mortise-and-tenon cabinet doors, queen bed, wardrobe storage and entertainment center. Keystone also offers a new 31-foot 280SBH fifth-wheel floorplan with rear bunk beds for the kids in its popular Laredo Super Lite series. Base MSRPs typically equipped begin at \$54,940. Keystone RV, 866-425-4369, [www.keystonerv.com](http://www.keystonerv.com)



KZRV DURANGO

### KZRV

A tri-level rear-kitchen floorplan has been added for 2013 to the newly redesigned Durango from KZRV. The unique 37-foot double-slideout floorplan, built on a bi-level drop-frame, features a new front cap designed to allow a greater turning radius, and has a side-aisle (streetside) front bath with a porcelain toilet, large neo-angle shower and linen closet. The 331RK queen-bed floorplan — one of 12 offered in the Durango series — has a dry weight of 9,740 pounds and is equipped with 110 cubic feet of storage under the kitchen, an 8-cubic-foot refrigerator with wood insert panel, solid-surface countertops, kitchen table with four chairs, Beauflor linoleum, slam-latch baggage doors, an L-shaped sofa bed and a 32-inch LCD TV. MSRP: \$49,999. KZRV LP, 260-768-4016, [www.kz-rv.com](http://www.kz-rv.com)



LIVIN' LITE MERCURY

### Livin' Lite

Livin' Lite Recreational Vehicles, known for its lightweight all-aluminum folding camping trailers and truck campers, has introduced the Mercury fifth-wheel. Livin' Lite's Mercury will have two 24-foot aluminum-and-composite floorplans, each equipped with a single slideout. Both are designed for half-ton pickups with GVWRs in the 3,500- to 4,500-pound range. One floorplan features double bunks in the upper

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## HALF-TON FUN



**NORTHWOOD  
FOX MOUNTAIN 285RLS**

bedroom, while the second will be equipped with a queen bed. Both will have dry baths with LP-gas stoves, refrigerators and water heaters. The interior is available in a wood-look Azdell composite or champagne aluminum. Base MSRP: \$26,000. **Living' Lite**, 574-862-2228, [www.livinlite.com](http://www.livinlite.com)

### Northwood

Northwood Manufacturing has given its Fox Mountain lightweight fifth-wheel a facelift for 2013. The redesigned Fox Mountain now has tan side walls, an aerodynamic mocha front cap and a more contemporary interior with stainless-steel appliances. Built on a cambered chassis, the fiberglass-and-aluminum Fox Mountain is available in six 26- to 32-foot floorplans with up to three slideouts. With a dry weight of 7,500 pounds in the 28-foot double-slide model, a standard Four Seasons package includes heated-and-enclosed underbellies, R-7 insulation in the side walls and floor, and R-18 in the roof. Features include solid-surface countertops, Beauflor floors, centrally located control panels, exterior showers and electric awnings. A combination sofa/dinette with leatherlike fabric is optional. Base MSRPs begin at \$32,500. **Northwood Manufacturing Inc.**, 800-766-6274, [www.northwoodmfg.com](http://www.northwoodmfg.com)



### Shasta

Forest River's Shasta Recreation Vehicle division has introduced the mid-profile Shasta Phoenix wide-body fifth-wheel with a distinctive exterior and a kingpin that can be adjusted to accommodate 5 1/2-foot-pickup beds. Available in eight floorplans with up to four slideouts, the Phoenix is 100 inches wide and available in eight 27- to 34-foot floorplans, all with 6 feet 4 inches of headroom in the upper deck bedroom. The gray hung fiberglass

side wall on a six-side aluminum superstructure is connected to the root-beer-colored front cap. Bamboo rattan accents in the cabinets and on the slide fascia, along with Beauflor wood-plank floors, give the Phoenix a lighter interior. Dry weights begin at 7,400 pounds. Base MSRPs start at \$30,000. **Shasta RV**, 574-825-7178, [www.shastarving.com](http://www.shastarving.com)

### Starcraft RV

Starcraft RV is building its 2013 Starcraft Travel Star FW fifth-wheel series on its own StarMaxx drop-frame chassis to increase the storage capacity to 75 cubic feet. Floorplans offering two or three slideouts and dry weights from 7,415 to 7,915 pounds are available. A standard Arctic Package includes heated and enclosed underbellies with foil insulation in the roof and slideout rooms. Amenities include bourbon-glazed beechwood solid-wood raised-panel doors and drawers throughout, porcelain toilet, radius shower, oversized sinks, Formica countertops, storage drawers beneath the booth dinette and large windows over the dinette. An optional Galaxy Package includes a colored fiberglass front cap; power stabilizer jacks; remote control for patio awnings; slideout, porch and security lights; front and rear jacks; solid-surface countertops; and a 32-inch LED TV with DVD player. Base MSRP starts at \$29,986. **Starcraft RV**, 800-945-4787, [www.starcraftcamping.com](http://www.starcraftcamping.com)

**STARCRAFT 275RKS**



## Winnebago

For those in the market for a midprofile fifth-wheel, Winnebago Towables has introduced the Winnebago Lite Five with four 28- to 34-foot floorplans, three of which are equipped with a single slideout and an optional wardrobe slide in the bedroom. With a cambered front cap, the fiberglass-and-aluminum Winnebago Lite Five, with dry weights from 6,907 to 8,953 pounds, can be towed by shortbed pickups. Features include high-gloss automotivelike gel coat exterior, fully enclosed-and-heated underbellies, 35,000-Btu furnace, high R-value insulation, patio awnings and stabilizer jacks. Amenities include a sectional sofa, island queen bed, a large bathroom with neo-angle shower, double-door refrigerators, a large amount of counter space and Bluetooth-enabled entertainment centers. Base MSRPs start at \$28,993.



Winnebago Industries, Inc.,  
574-825-5250, [www.winnebagoind.com](http://www.winnebagoind.com)



## Yellowstone

The Yellowstone division of Gulf Stream Coach has added a 29-foot rear-living room floorplan to its Canyon Trail XLT fifth-wheel series. The low-profile Canyon Trail XLT 25FLRW floorplan, with a dry weight of 7,297 pounds, has a single 38-inch-deep, 6-foot-2-inch tall slideout that contains a convertible sofa/dinette. Offering a large hallway closet with mirrored doors, the 25FLRW has a separate shower and

bathroom, hardwood cabinet doors and drawers, laminated countertops with a solid-surface option and a queen bed with a flip-down fabric headboard with hidden storage. To accommodate shortbed pickups, the aluminum-framed vacuum-bonded side wall Canyon Trail XLT has an extended kingpin box. MSRP: \$29,253. Yellowstone RV, 800-811-0302, [www.yellowstonervs.com](http://www.yellowstonervs.com)

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**WALK-THROUGH:** COACHMEN APEX 288BHS ULTRA-LITE

# Lean and Green

Coachmen's Apex 288BHS Ultra-Lite trailer piles on the amenities — and sleeping capacity — in an easy-to-tow trailer

**F**or nearly 50 years, Coachmen Industries has been building some of the nation's most recognizable RVs. The first Coachmen RVs were manufactured in a small 5,000-square-foot facility in downtown Middlebury, Indiana. Since then, Coachman — now a Forest River brand — has manufactured more than 600,000 RVs.

Coachmen's new Apex travel trailers represent a slight shift in the manufacturer's focus: The company has traded its usual lauan substrate construction for Azdel Superlite, which is 50 percent lighter than wood, for use in its new laminated fiberglass side walls. This results in a durable, lightweight product that helps meet the demands of Coachmen's discerning customers. "The ultra-light market is the fastest growing segment in the

industry," says Brittany Logan, Apex's sales coordinator. "We have 18 floorplans less than 5,000 pounds, which makes it possible for our trailers to be towed with a half-ton or less tow vehicle." A vacuum-bonded/aluminum caged roof, floor and walls round out the lightweight construction techniques. They all come courtesy of the mandatory Exterior Package (\$3,197; it's mandatory so you count it as part of the base price), which also includes (among other things) a laminated crowned roof, E-Z Lube axles, outside speakers and stabilizer jacks.

The 288BHS under the spotlight here features a double-bed over a double-bed bunkhouse in the rear, which — when combined with the queen up front, the 81-inch convertible dinette and optional residential sofa (\$200) — ups the sleeping capacity to a

robust 10 happy campers. Clearly, the Apex is designed with families in mind.

Once you've arrived in camp, the rear bunkhouse area can be cordoned off from the rest of the trailer by a sliding curtain, and a small ladder affords the younger (or more nimble) folk access to the top bunk. Next to the bunk area is the smallish bathroom, which doesn't exactly invite long-term stays but offers enough room to get the job done. A separate entry from the outside allows RVers access to the lav without tracking in the inevitable dirt and grime a party of 10 would pick up on their shoes or hiking boots.

The galley is located amidships, and is exactly what you'd expect to find in a trailer of this size. The microwave, 6-cubic-foot double-door refrigerator, three-burner high-

The free-flowing interior of the Apex is designed for a large family (inset, above). The single streetside slide opens up the interior living space which allows room for family and friends.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER



PHOTO COURTESY VANBOXTEL RV



output range with oven, double-bowl sink and seamless countertops are all part of the mandatory Interior Package (\$1,878). A 13,500-Btu air conditioner, AM/FM/CD stereo, skylight in the bathroom and a host of other niceties are also included.

The only slide in the 288BHS is located streetside and houses the galley and residential sofa, and really opens up the interior space, creating the feeling of a true living area. The refrigerator is located on the wall across from the prep space, which can be a bit irritating at times; but we're only talking about a few steps, so it's by no means a deal-breaker. The dinette is fine for a family of five (with little ones), but things would get quite a bit cramped if you were feeding all 10 of the trailer's potential occupants. The sofa, dinette and whatever picnic table is located outside would definitely all have to be in play.

The 288BHS we tested features the Apex Elite Package (\$1,414), which improves the window treatments and serves up the 24-inch LED TV and DVD player in the pillared entertainment center. The center is located at the foot of the queen bed in the master, a configuration that continues to gain popularity in today's family friendly trailers. This makes for fine viewing from the living area (and the bedroom if equipped with a swivel), but this often means that taller RVers may have their legs cramped while trying to get a good night's rest on the shorter queen mattress.



The Apex 288BHS Ultra-Lite's dinette, sofa and dual bunks all offer comfortable accommodations for overnight guests. The well-equipped galley would no doubt experience heavy usage should all 10 sleeping positions be filled.

The aforementioned Apex Interior Package also gets buyers an Evergreen Sleep Mattress and comforter, which do their best to improve the sleeping situation. Dual wardrobes and overhead storage complete the bedroom.

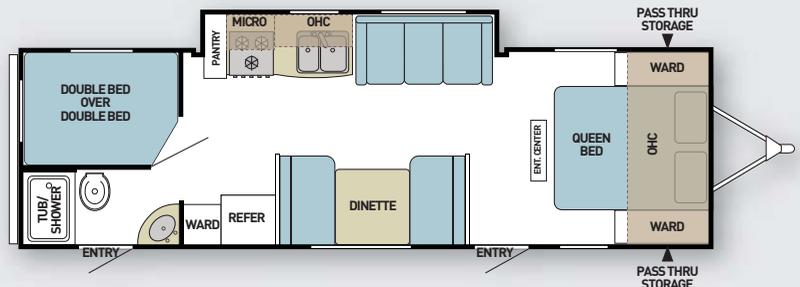
Apart from being lightweight, Apex trailers are TRA gold-level rated, meaning they utilize effective production techniques along with efficient usage of energy and water to produce

minimal environmental impact.

If you have a large family or a core group of friends who like to travel together, it can often be difficult to accommodate your RVing needs, especially in a lightweight trailer. The Apex has certainly addressed that problem. Though the dining and bathroom areas may be a bit snug for all those loved ones, the 288BHS offers an interesting floorplan that is sure to be a hit with RVers young and old. 🚐

## QUICK INFO

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GVWR	7,000 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$28,021
MSRP, as tested	\$30,679



Coachmen RV, [www.coachmenrv.com](http://www.coachmenrv.com), 800-353-7383. Circle 201 on Reader Service Card.  
Special thanks to VanBoxtel RV, [www.vanboxtelrv.com](http://www.vanboxtelrv.com), 888-831-5267



### Maxxis HT-770 Tires

Maxxis HT-770 Premium Highway Terrains are all-season tires for truck owners. Maxxis increased casing stiffness and added tread reinforcements to improve overall braking performance, noticeable when hauling or towing, according to the company. The sidewall was fine-tuned to improve overall ride and stability especially during emergency maneuvers or when traveling in heavy crosswinds. The HT-770s feature closed-shoulder design and multipitch technology for minimized pattern noise, which is said to reduce driver fatigue.

Available in LT metric and metric sizes from 15 to 20 inches. Mileage warranty on metric sizes is 60,000 miles.

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

Circle 202 on Reader Service Card.



### FlowDown You Move Too Fast!

A new concept in RV sewer hose support systems is the FlowDown, a fully adjustable RV drain system. It sets up easily and can be routed in a straight line, around corners or over objects. The system extends to 10 1/2 feet and adjusts to most any slope. It stores in a compact carry bag when not in use. Many RV parks require the sewer hose to be elevated and have adequate slope to drain the sewage. The FlowDown addresses varying heights and locations of sewer connections. The hose stays in place while dumping the holding tank.

Check out the website for an instructional video.

**MSRP: \$79.95 plus freight**

**800-367-1533, [www.flowdown.net](http://www.flowdown.net)**

Circle 203 on Reader Service Card.



### Rooftop Air Conditioner and Heat Pump

Coleman-Mach's Mach 8 low-profile Rooftop Air Conditioner and Heat Pump stands 8 inches for less drag and improved fuel efficiency.

Using two motors, the Mach 8 delivers the same rate of cooling on both high- and low-speed operation, and supplies ultra-quiet airflow on low speed for nighttime comfort.

The company claims the Mach 8, weighing approximately 90 pounds, is the lightest low-profile unit on the market. It's designed to operate effectively in outside temperatures up to 125 degrees F and is easy to install.

The Mach 8 is offered in 9,000-, 13,500- and 15,000-Btu models.

**MSRP: \$1,000 base**

**316-832-3400, [www.airxcel.com](http://www.airxcel.com)**

Circle 204 on Reader Service Card.



### GOJO Hand Cleaner Degreaser

GOJO's Cherry Gel Pumice Hand Cleaner Degreaser is a fast and effective solution to tough soils that come with working under the hood. The Gel Pumice cleans the heaviest dirt, grease and oil, and is pH balanced to promote skin comfort while leaving hands smelling fresh. The cleaner clings to hands (instead of falling into the sink) and then effortlessly rinses clean, according to the company. The special formula combines pumice scrubbers with gel cleaning for a balance of performance and healthy skin. GOJO Cherry Gel Pumice Hand Cleaner works with GOJO PRO TDX Dispensing Systems. The units are backed by a lifetime guarantee and contain sanitary sealed refills to prevent contamination. The portion-control dispensers feature easy one-hand push operation and a large sight window. 📞

**MSRP: \$4.50 to \$6, [www.gojo.com](http://www.gojo.com)** Circle 205 on Reader Service Card.



## CORSA and dB Performance Products

With fuel prices fluctuating near historic highs, many RV enthusiasts are looking for ways to get more power out of the smaller engine options, and to improve the efficiency of their existing tow vehicles.

CORSA and dB Performance Exhaust, both owned by TMG Performance Products LLC and based in Berea, Ohio, have been making aftermarket exhaust systems for cars, trucks and SUVs for years. Recently they expanded their product lineup to include low-restriction air-intake systems. We recently met with Carmin Vincent of CORSA, who showed us the new line of high-performance intake and exhaust systems. By combining intake and exhaust upgrades, vehicle owners can boost performance significantly — and get a pleasing sound from the engines — along with the ease of one-stop shopping.

### Intake Systems

CORSA intakes are designed to work in conjunction with the company's exhaust systems to produce maximum performance. CORSA's Power Channel Technology streamlines airflow from the air-filter element into the throttle body, which eliminates calibration concerns and improves throttle response. The optimized shapes and less-restrictive intakes compared to original equipment are designed to increase horsepower and torque.

Larger diameters, gradual bends and smooth transitions improve flow. Hand-formed aerospace-grade carbon-fiber construction is utilized for maximum strength and light weight. The carbon fiber has a built-in thermal barrier to reduce heat absorption by the incoming air as it passes near the engine. Compared to original equipment, the

CORSA systems increase airflow volume and volumetric efficiency and decrease pumping losses, which improves power and fuel efficiency.

Intakes include a washable filter using Donaldson PowerCore Filtration Technology. It reduces airflow restriction by directing air through specifically designed channels sculpted to maximize the engine's breathing. Intakes are direct bolt-ons, so there's no cutting or drilling, and they typically install in 10 minutes or less, according to the manufacturer.

### Exhaust Systems

CORSA's patented Reflective Sound Cancellation (RSC) Technology acoustic tuning is designed to produce an aggressive



Corsa's new replacement air-intake system.

sound under acceleration, along with a drone-free experience during cruise. Droning is a common problem with performance exhausts and with RSC, unwanted, low-frequency sound waves are diverted through specifically designed channels and are reversed 180 degrees. This effectively cancels them out, without excessive restrictions. The mufflers' straight-through, unrestricted design reduces back pressure, thereby increasing horsepower and torque.

Exhaust tubing is manufactured using mandrel-bent stainless-steel construction. According to dB, the exhaust systems for Chevrolet Silverado/GMC Sierra 2500HD 6.0-liter trucks are 18 pounds lighter than stock, and provide increased airflow of 41 percent.

On the Toyota Tundra system CORSA reports increased airflow of 16 percent, which translates to gains of 21 horsepower and 30 LB-FT of torque in this application. Other models have similar results.

Intake and exhaust systems are available for most popular light trucks and SUVs. For more information, call 800-486-0999, or visit [www.corsaperformance.com](http://www.corsaperformance.com).



Cutaway view of a muffler with Corsa's patented Reflective Sound Cancellation Technology. The RSC Technology reverses and cancels sound waves and eliminates droning sounds in the cab.

# nVisioning Things

Simple-to-install Back-Up Sensor System uses a camera and ultrasonic sensors to prevent surprises when negotiating reverse maneuvers

DIFFICULTY

1 2 3 4 5

TIME TO COMPLETE 30 MINUTES TO 1 HOUR

TOOLS NEEDED

TEST LIGHT, PHILLIPS SCREWDRIVER, WIRE CUTTER, WIRE CRIMPER (WHEN HARD WIRING)

Ofentimes when RV topics are discussed among owners, visibility when backing up is as popular as road height, weight and kitchen-counter space. Without a doubt, one of the most common restrictions with any type of RV is rear visibility, whether backing into a site or hitching up. It seems that there is always some kind of blind spot no matter the situation and it gets really spooky when a pedestrian is barely missed or an unfamiliar fixture at the site is accidentally reconfigured. An extra set of eyes is always worth its weight in gold. However, if the extra set of eyes is not attached to a preferred travel companion, one can always turn to a unique, multipurpose license-plate bracket called nVision.

The nVision is basically a replacement mounting bracket for a standard license plate incorporating a very capable rearview camera system and sensing device that notifies the driver of any obstacles. The specially crafted bracket is ruggedly constructed of plastic that uses small vertical splines that allow for fine tuning [aiming] the adjustable camera. Aiding the camera are the two ultrasonic SmartZone sensors, one residing to each side of the camera, that are also adjustable.

The SmartZone sensors have been optimized to operate within a 5.5-foot range providing three zones: a safe zone (3.5 to 5.5 feet from the back of the vehicle), a caution zone (1.5 to 3.5 feet) and a danger zone (0 to 1.5 feet). By design, the two SmartZone sensors are intended to pick up obstacles from each



(Above, left) Back-up camera and ultrasonic SmartZone sensors on each side are attached to a frame that holds the license plate. (Above, right) Camera can be adjusted by loosening setscrew that releases spline. (Below) Color monitor with 3 1/2-inch screen can be mounted on the dash at the discretion of the owner. Two-face tape will do the job.

respective side and will work together for center sensing as the object becomes closer — all of which the camera may not be able to see. The information from nVision's camera and sensors is transmitted to a 3.5-inch color monitor displaying distinctive warning zones. An audible alert will change from slower beeps to a solid sound when an impact is imminent.

There's not much more to installing the nVision than following a simple three-step process using a few common tools to complete. First, start by choosing a monitor location and the route for its cable. Once the cable has been run there are only two wires to connect: a ground and power wire. And there are two ways to go about this task. If your vehicle has a factory towing package, the kit provides an adapter for plugging right into the

7-way wiring receptacle. You simply separate the plug at the rear of the receptacle and install the kit adapter in its place. From here the original plug is snapped into the adapter.

The other choice is to splice the power (red) wire into the back-up light positive wire and ground the other (black) wire. The easiest way to do this is to remove a taillight, put the vehicle in reverse with the engine off and ignition on and probe the plug via test light until it lights up, and splice the wires. The wires are then routed to the license-plate area. After the wiring portion is complete, it's just a matter of installing

(continued on page 88)

**CLEAR REAR VIEW** » Information from nVision's camera and sensors is transmitted to a 3.5-inch color monitor that displays distinctive warning zones.



## OFF-SEASON STORAGE

**Q** We have a 2008 27-foot Forest River Wildwood LE Toy Hauler. We live in Wisconsin and the trailer is currently winterized. Is there any harm in leaving the unit plugged into shorepower 24/7 during the off-season? I bought the unit used, and it did not come with any manuals. I have tried the manufacturer's website, but it does not refer to this situation. Also, I believe the converter is also a battery maintainer when plugged into shorepower. Is this true?

**Gayle Roofe, Ottawa, Wisconsin**



**A** This is a frequently asked question, Gayle, with an easy answer. Unless the RV has a converter that has a "smart charging" system, you can damage the battery by leaving it plugged in 24/7. A standard converter will overcharge the batteries because it can't tell when they're fully charged. A smart-charger converter drops its charge rate to a trickle when the battery is full, which avoids overcharge problems. Locate the converter — it may be under a dinette seat, for example, or adjacent to an exterior storage compartment — and check the manufacturer's website for an owner's manual. That will explain what type the Wildwood has and if it's a smart charger. — **Jeff Johnston**

## MORE TIRE REPLACEMENT, WHEEL BEARINGS

**Q** I replaced the four tires on our 30-foot Sunnybrook in June 2007. The tires are ST225/75R15 Goodyear Marathon five-ply. Since then we have accumulated approximately 21,000 miles. The trailer is stored on a gravel base with plastic strips underneath the tires, and they are covered.

This year we expect to travel less than 5,000 miles. Considering the travel we are planning for 2013, are the tires in need of replacement? What recommendations might you make?

Secondly, in November 2011, I had the brake shoes, backing plates and seals replaced, and the bearings

greased. Since then I used the trailer for one season and put on approximately 3,000 miles. Will it be necessary to have the bearings regreased prior to my trip? Previously, I have done this every two years.

**Mike Mudry, via email**

**A** We address these exact questions on a regular basis, Mike. For example, check the *RV Clinic* column in the March issue, page 75, for more on tire wear, replacement and tire age. As for recommended bearing-pack intervals, Al-Ko Kober/Hayes Axle and Dexter Axle suggest the bearings be serviced every 12 months or 12,000 miles. If in doubt, have the wheel

(continued on page 80)

### THE TECH TEAM



**KEN FREUND:** Ken is a former ASE Certified Master Technician, service manager and shop owner who has authored numerous books on automotive repair.



**JEFF JOHNSTON:** Jeff served as technical director of *Trailer Life* for 18 years and has been an RV enthusiast, mechanic and writer since he could hold a wrench.

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(continued from page 77)

bearings inspected and serviced. The annual cost of a bearing repack is minimal compared to the price of damage repair or new bearings or axles.

Tire manufacturers generally recommend that tires be replaced after they're about seven years old simply because the tires have reached the end of their anticipated useful lifespan. As long as the manufacture date of the tires is within seven years and they are in good condition, with no serious weather checking, sidewall cracks, tread separations, worn tread or other problems, there's no reason you shouldn't continue using them. — J.J.

### TRAILER 12-VOLT DC MYSTERY

**Q** We have a 2008 Forest River Sierra trailer. While inside, turning on two lights works fine, but when I turn on a third light, there's a hissing noise that comes from behind the breaker box. We believe the sound may be coming from the converter. It doesn't have to specifically be a light as the third thing is turned on — we can open the refrigerator door and the sound starts. The interesting part of this is when we turn on a fourth light it sometimes stops, and if we turn on the exterior light from within the trailer, all the lights get brighter.

**Phil Pawlowski, Forked River, New Jersey**

**A** The first part of your letter is easy, Phil. The hissing noise you hear is the cooling fan in the converter. As the electrical load on the 12-volt DC system increases, the converter circuitry gets warmer and automatically turns on the cooling fan.

As the load increases the converter has to step up its charging rate to replace the current drawing from the battery. The first lights you turn on are just running on the battery alone. You switch on 12-volt DC devices and with each extra load, the power available from the battery for all of them gets a bit smaller so they get progressively dimmer, for example, if it's lights you're turning on. Then the converter kicks in and begins a higher-level charge rate for the battery, which makes the lights brighten up. This kind of bright-and-dim action is

common in many RVs.

If the charging circuit kicks in quickly after you start using even a modest amount of 12-volt DC power it could also indicate that the battery is not being fully charged, or the battery may be defective. Even though it may be original to the 2008 trailer, it may be worthwhile to have its cells tested for condition. — J.J.

### 30-AMP EXTENSION CORD

**Q** We purchased an RV for our teenage grandkids to stay in when they visit. We had a 30-amp 120-volt AC dedicated circuit installed near our electric panel on our house. The RV sits at the far end of our driveway, approximately 75 feet from the house. We want to run power out to the RV by going around the driveway (so the cord won't be run over) and we need about 150 feet of extension. The kids just sleep in the RV, they don't use the refrigerator or microwave, only lights. Can you suggest something that isn't too expensive? The estimate we received from the electrician was more than \$1,000.

**Collette Trembly, via email**

**A** A custom-built 30-amp extension cord will be costly simply because the cable is expensive, likely several dollars a foot, but you should be able to come up with a safe and functional solution for less than \$1,000. Your local home improvement or electrical hardware store will have the cable and end fittings readily available. By choosing the right cable size there's no reason your grandkids can't run any of your RV's accessories designed to operate on 120-volts AC with the exception of the microwave and air conditioner. The fact that it's a 150-foot run means the gauge will need to be even larger than for a shorter extension. You'll need some pretty stout cable in the 12- to 10-gauge range. You can search online to determine the correct way to wire the end plugs yourself or hire an electrician to complete the job for you. — J.J.

### CHARGING RATES

**Q** We have an Alpenlite 32-foot fifth-wheel with a Xantrex Freedom Inverter/Charger. Does the output of this

unit, about 13.5 volts, meet float charge expectations? I keep an electric heater in the coach during winter months, but don't want to overcharge my six 6-volt batteries. I have a manual auto-fill feature with this rig that seems to work OK. Most everything I read seems to indicate that the float volts should be about 13.4. Today when I looked it was 13.7 volts, which seems high.

**Paul Hassing, Spokane, Washington**

**A** The Xantrex inverter/chargers have one of the best charging circuits of any inverter/charger, but 13.7 volts is a little high. Monitor it over time to see if it happened to be switching between charging modes when you checked it. Check the water in the batteries often at first to be safe, and continue to use the inverter/charger during storage only if water use isn't excessive. Otherwise take the batteries out and keep them in the garage on a maintenance charger during extended storage. — **Ken Freund**

## SHOWER GRAB BARS

**Q** We recently purchased a Starcraft Autumn Ridge 265RLS. It has a wonderful shower, but there's a step up of about 6 to 8 inches to enter the shower. We thought it would be safer if there were some sort of grab bar in the shower so we had the dealer contact Starcraft to see if there was any such option. Starcraft neither had a grab bar nor any suggestions on how one could be installed. Since we are sure we are not the only senior-citizen campers, we were wondering if you knew of any way the shower could be made safer.

**Cap Neilson, Williamsburg, Virginia**

**A** This looks like a job for your local home-improvement store, Cap! Starcraft probably wasn't much help because it wouldn't want any part of the liability involved. Measure your shower space, visit a home-improvement store and take a look at the bathroom grab bars they have available in a variety of sizes and configurations. They'll also have fasteners available to suit the hollow wall or stud mounts you'll be using. Chances are good they can set you

up with the hardware and your dealer can then follow through with the installation. — **J.J.**

## 12-VOLT DC POWER LOSS, PART ONE

**Q** I read Robert Maresco's question ("Power Problem," February issue) about the loss of 12-volt DC power in his trailer. I have been there and done that. I had the same conditions and a dealer north of Springfield, Missouri, found the problem. The ground cable had come loose from the trailer frame. They found this with a continuity meter and very little help from the manufacturer. The dealer spent some time finding the problem and five minutes to fix it. The trailer was new and under warranty so I did not receive a bill.

**Edwin Yarter, Apex, North Carolina**

## 12-VOLT DC POWER LOSS, PART TWO

**A** The letter in your February column from Robert Maresco regarding the total loss of 12-volt DC power reminded me of a similar situation that I faced some years ago. After I put the batteries back into their compartment in our motorhome in the spring — an awkward and difficult procedure due to a small compartment, small access door and heavy batteries — I also found there was no 12-volt DC power in my unit. I checked the fuses and all connections, but couldn't figure out what was wrong.

When I finally took the RV to a dealer, a technician solved the issue in about two minutes. He was good enough to show me the problem, and it was then that I learned about the little marine-type DC circuit breakers that are often installed in RV battery compartments. Apparently, in fumbling a battery into place I had bumped the breaker's button and popped it open. Being at that time only familiar with 120-volt AC household-type circuit breakers, I had not known to check these marine-style breakers in the battery compartment.

I wonder if Maresco faces a similar problem. I note that he says that he checked the fuses and breakers, but perhaps, like me, he did not know

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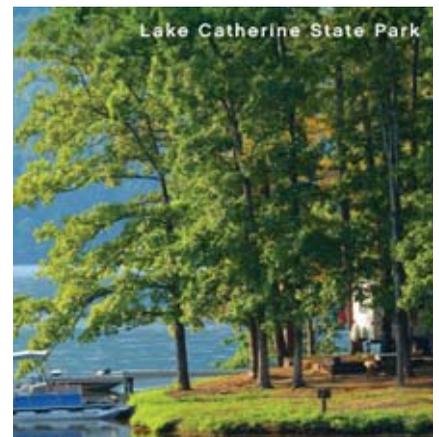
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about these DC breakers, which are so different in appearance, operation and location from what we usually think of as "circuit breakers."

**Ted McGrath, Eden, Utah**

**A** Thank you for the suggestions, guys. We target bad ground connections as the source for many electrical ills and your experience, Edwin, reinforces the notion. Ted, many people may indeed not know about those breakers so your note is very useful. — J.J.

## TRUCK HITCH WEIGHT

**Q** I have asked several dealers and it seems like I get different answers on the hitch weight of a truck. We tow a 29-foot travel trailer with our Toyota Tundra. It pulls this trailer nicely. We are looking to buy a newer model of the same trailer that has a front bed slide. This slide will increase the trailer hitch weight from 800 pounds on our existing trailer to 1,100 pounds on the new one. This is almost the hitch weight of a

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fifth-wheel! The GVWR is still only 9,980 pounds, which we can easily tow and we use a weight-distributing hitch. Can you please give us the formula on how to calculate the hitch weight on a truck? If you could also give us the formula calculating the hitch weight for a fifth-wheel, that would be helpful in case we find a fifth-wheel trailer that we like better.

**The Fishers, Estero, Florida**

**A** First, look at the rating posted on the hitch receiver on your truck. Somewhere on the hitch, or in your owner's manual, it gives the maximum gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) for the hitch receiver, and that's the most trailer weight overall that can be hauled by the receiver with an appropriate-sized ball-mount assembly. The information will also give the maximum hitch weight allowable for that hitch receiver.

To determine the truck's maximum hitch weight, take your truck to a public scale and weigh the rear axle. Then look at your truck's data plate and you'll find its gross axle weight rating (GAWR) for the rear axle. Deduct the measured weight from the GAWR and that's how much load can be added to the rear axle without overloading it and exceeding the manufacturer's specifications. Of course, you'll also need to deduct the weight of any cargo in the bed, the hitch (measure again after you install the hitch), and the weight that any passengers in the cab will add to the rear axle weight as well. All of these things add to the truck's weight and deduct from the capacity left for the fifth-wheel trailer's hitch weight. — J.J.

**AIR BAGS AND FORD TRUCK**

**Q** Regarding Firestone Industrial's R4Tech system ("Products," December 2012) and the letter from Mike Feldman about needing air bags on his 2011 Ford (*RV Clinic*, February issue), I also have a 2011 F-350 and tow a 2007 Cameo. When hooked up, the rear suspension rubber bumpers engage the overload springs. I called a service center to have air bags installed and was informed by a technician that he did not recommend air bags on new Fords due

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to all the rear-axle sensors (ABS, etc.) and felt that it would change the axle geometry and body angle enough to defeat the sensors.

**Gene Hunter, Salem, Oregon**

**A** I believe that technician was probably being a bit conservative with his, "we don't want the liability" stance, Gene. Most vehicle dynamics sensor inputs come from the transmission, wheels, or inside the differential housing. There have been axle-height sensors that adjust rear-axle braking force depending on the load on the bed and how far it moves relative to the axle as the springs squat, but that doesn't apply to this truck. All air bags do is help keep the truck's frame riding at an appropriate height when an extra load is applied. As long as the installers don't make any modifications to any of the sensor mounts or mechanisms when installing the air bags then there should be no reason an air-bag system is not appropriate for your truck. Check the air

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bag manufacturer's website for specific make and model application recommendations. — J.J.

### CHARGING PROBLEM

**Q** I bought a discontinued new Pilgrim trailer in 2008. I have been having problems with my AC generator fully charging the system. The gauge inside the trailer will only register charged after quite a long period of running the AC generator. Last fall I couldn't get the trailer to charge at all, either off the pickup or the AC generator according to the gauge. I brought it home, plugged into the house current and the next day it was fully charged. I've talked to the dealership that sold me the trailer and it has them stumped on what could cause this. I'm wondering if the little gauge in the monitor panel could be faulty, or could it be the inverter? I don't want to start replacing parts until I have a pretty good idea of what's causing this.

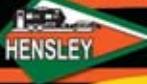
**D. Wasserburger, via email**

**A** The monitor panels have frequent problems and are often inaccurate. To check it, just connect a digital voltmeter on the battery terminals and take a reading. If it's 12.6 volts or higher at rest with nothing charging or drawing current, the battery is fully charged. Check it at rest first. Plug in the trailer to outside 120-volt AC power and check the charging voltage (via the converter). Unplug the trailer, crank up the generator and check the voltage again. Each test will show if that item is charging sufficiently. Charging voltage should be 13.8 to 14.2 volts. Often, the charging line from a tow vehicle isn't heavy enough gauge (too small in diameter) or the integrity of the connections is breached and, as a result, you get so much voltage drop that the battery won't get fully charged when towing. The wire should be 8 gauge. Plug the umbilical cord from the trailer into the tow vehicle. Start the engine and check voltage at the batteries again. — K.F.

### ADEQUATE TOWING CAPACITY

**Q** I have a question about what is considered adequate towing capacity

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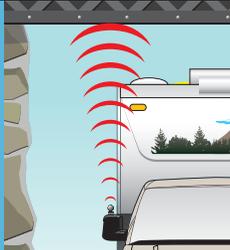
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relative to a fifth-wheel trailer's overall weight. I've been overseas and away from RVs for many years, but will retire in 18 months. We are considering buying a midsize fifth-wheel. The models we're looking at are 32 to 35 feet and have GVWRs of 13,500 pounds (on average). Dry weights average 11,000 pounds. We want to buy a Ford F-250, which has a rated towing capacity of 14,000 pounds. Would this F-250 be enough, or must one use only some lower percentage of towing capacity for safety? Should we assume we would pull a trailer with only 75 percent of the truck's rated capacity?

Dick Morris, Luanda, Angola

**A** When vehicles are frequently used at or near their maximum rated capacities, performance and durability tend to suffer. You have to try to find a balance between cost and capacity. I generally recommend about a 20 percent reserve of towing capacity when choosing a tow vehicle as a rule of thumb, although 25 percent as you mention is even better. When you read the fine print of tow ratings, you will find they are based on the assumption that the tow vehicle will just have one person in it, and nothing in the cargo bed, etc. When you add all the cargo and passengers it typically reduces the actual tow rating. Also, trailers are often heavier than expected. These factors tend to whittle away at the excess capacity rating. There is no firm rule or regulation on this, so it's always a judgment call subject to personal opinion.

The truck's tow rating is a guideline. You need to compare the actual weight of the truck loaded with full fuel, supplies and passengers against the gross combined weight rating (GCWR). You'll also need to compare actual axle weight with the gross axle weight rating (GAWR) when determining if the fifth-wheel's hitch weight can be handled by the truck. — K.F.

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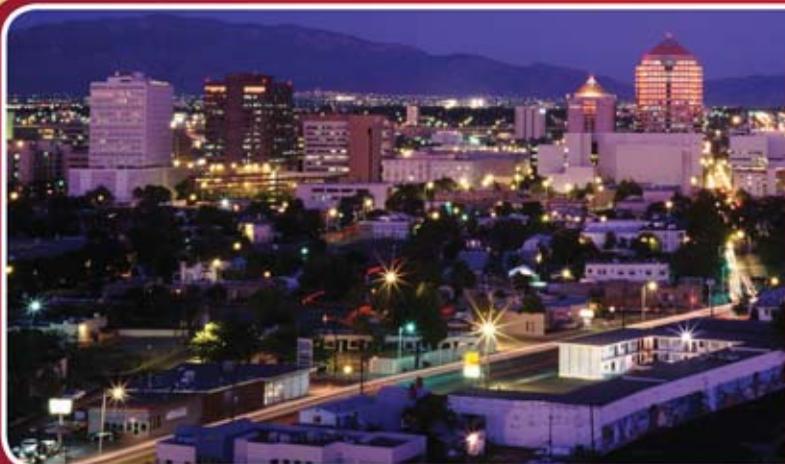


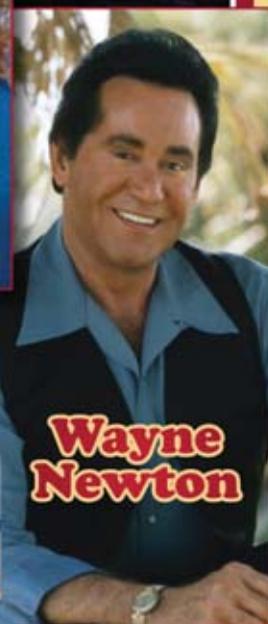
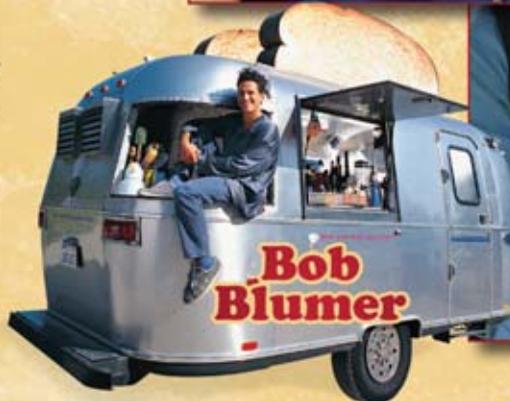
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Contents



(continued from page 76)

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Power connection can be made to the backup wiring at the light housing (top) or by using the adapter (above) that comes with the nVision kit. The adapter plugs into the factory 7-way receptacle.

the nVision plate mount and connecting the cables. From here the sensors and camera are adjusted to suit individual needs. The system is designed to come on when in reverse, but that can be bypassed by wiring directly into 12-volt DC power and adding a switch, if you don't want it activated every time the ignition switch is in the on position. Also, the system is designed for mounting in the center of the rear, so even though extension cables are available from the company, it's not recommended to install at the back of trailers unless the license plate can be relocated.

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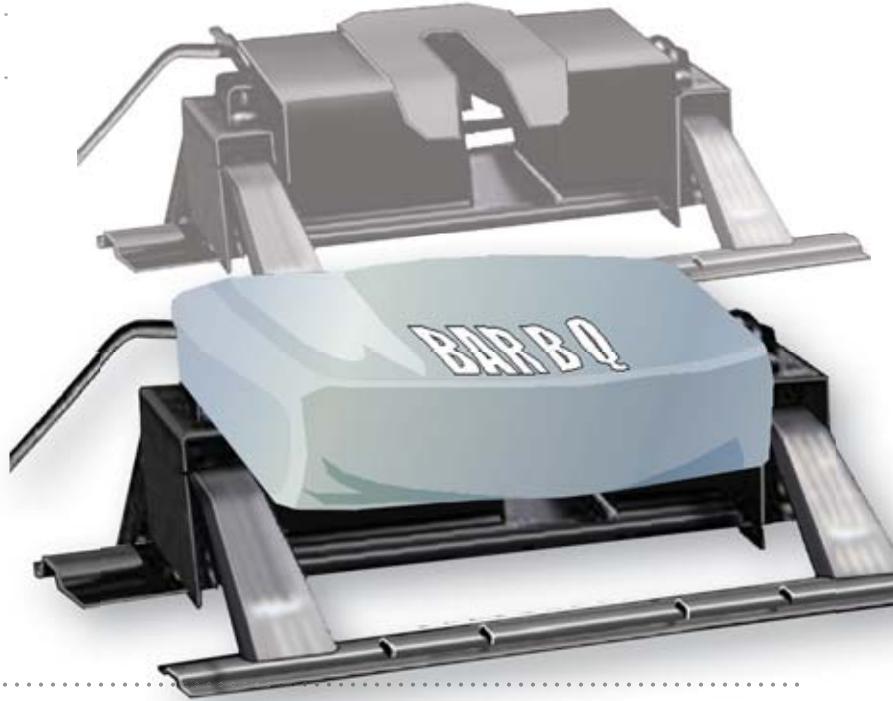
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## Hitch Cover

I have come up with an easy way to cover the fifth-wheel hitch when not in use while in the bed of my truck to protect it from the weather. While buying parts for my barbecue at Home Depot a few months ago it occurred to me that the cover for a Weber Q barbecue would do just fine. I purchased it for about \$8 and adapted it to cover my hitch saddle. It works great.

I simply cut a small hole on the side of the cover to slip it over the jaw-release arm and fit it over the hitch head. It has drawstrings on the bottom that I cinch up so it fits snugly and won't come off. The size of the cover would probably accommodate most hitches.

It is a simple solution that does not cost much.  
**Virgil Weber, Glendora, California**



## Soggy Shoe Solution

Oftentimes our shoes get wet or dirty while walking the dogs. Here is our solution to storing these shoes where they can dry off and be out of the way while we're parked, yet readily available. All it takes is a small piece of hardware cloth positioned across the entry step, braced and secured with zip ties. It does not require removal for traveling. It's very simple and the bottoms of the shoes dry quickly due to the open mesh of the hardware cloth.

**Danny Lindstrom, Salinas, California**



### QUICK FIX

#### Better Zzzzzzzzz

We are new RV owners and retired. The first thing we discovered was that we stay up late and want to get up late, but with our 2012 travel trailer with its two entrance door windows and two vent skylights, the morning was just a burst of sunlight! The two skylights are easy: Camping World has vent cushions that push up in the vent

and block cold, heat and light.

To cover the windows on the two entrance doors, we found 20-by-30-inch foam boards for \$1 each at the Dollar Store. One side is black and the other side white. Simply place the foam boards between the door and the screen on the ledge that most screen doors have, cut off any excess and when the evening

comes, trap the foam boards in between the screen door and the outside door. The ledge holds them in place, and now it is dark in the trailer in the morning with just a glow through the night shades showing. We pop them out in the morning and store them under the bed. Better zzzzzzzzz!

**Buzz Coplen, via email**

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

# Heritage Railway

A scenic trip through history



**"R**ailroads invented tourism. Before we had trains, no one could take a trip," Bob McCracken explained as he stood next to a diesel-powered locomotive. He is a conductor on the French Lick Scenic Railway and a retired Methodist minister. "Prior to having reliable cars and decent roads, a family vacation took a couple of months if they

wanted to go any distance. The railroad changed all that."

Like practically everybody working in our country's tourist-train business, McCracken is a volunteer.

In North America we have 305 tourist trains, and most of them are in the Northeastern United States. The majority are just scenic rides in century-old passenger cars. Some are dinner trains. A few, like the Grand Canyon Railway, provide roundtrip travel to a destination.

"Before there was Las Vegas, people came here to the middle of Indiana to gamble," McCracken said. "French Lick was the vacation spot for the gangsters up in Chicago."

In the 1920s, the train was the only way to get here. As many as 13 trains a day were coming to French Lick. That service ended in the 1940s.

"This was an upscale destination — two world-class hotels, showplaces really," McCracken continued. "The dome at the West Baden Springs Hotel was called 'The eighth wonder of the world' when it was built in 1901. It creates a 30,000-square-foot atrium with five floors of rooms facing into it. The dome was the largest in the world until the Houston Astrodome was put up in 1964."

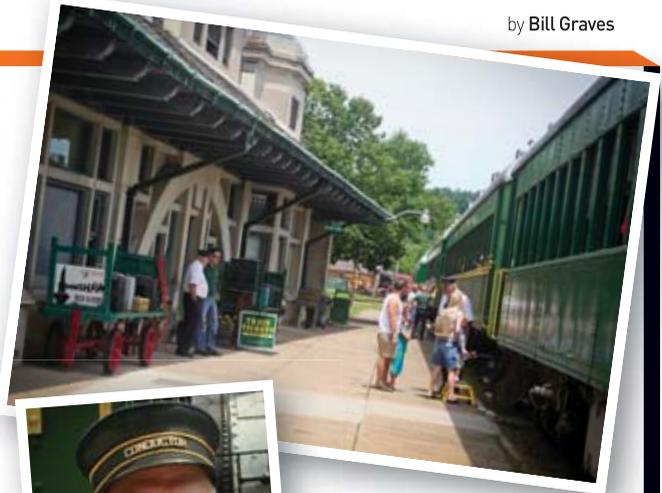
McCracken called, "All aboard!"

He told me to grab a chair in the baggage car near Allen Barnett, who narrates the trip on the train's public address system. Barnett lives here and has been a volunteer on the railroad for 20 years. He is now its general manager.

The train goes through 20 miles of the Hoosier National Forest. The engineer has a chainsaw in the cab in case he has to stop and remove a tree that's fallen across the track.

Halfway into the trip, we entered Burton Tunnel which is 2,200 feet long — almost half a mile. And that's a long way at 5 mph when the temperature drops to 55 degrees and it's pitch dark.

"This was the playground of the rich and famous,"



This scenic railway has 65 pieces of rolling stock. The locomotives are all diesels. Bob McCracken, a retired minister, is one of 60 volunteers who works on the train and in the museum, which is in the station.

Barnett said. "It was here in 1931 that Franklin Roosevelt announced at a Democrat Governor's Conference that he was going to run for president.

"There were a dozen places to gamble, all illegal, of course. People here worked in the casinos, generation after generation. But they couldn't patronize them. They had bouncers to keep the locals out. That way the churches didn't make a fuss that gambling was a bad influence on the community. That the casinos donated money to the churches had a calming influence, too, I'm sure. Lots of little churches around here were built with casino money."

Gambling was shut down here in 1949, but has since become legal in Indiana. A new casino is attached to the fully restored French Lick Resort Hotel.

Here's an interesting bit for Trivial Pursuit fans: Tomato juice as a drink was invented at French Lick Springs Hotel in 1917 by chef Louis Perrin and head waiter Dan Hughes. They discarded the pulp and seeds of squeezed tomatoes and thickened the beverage. The first tomato-juice factory was formed in 1925 in French Lick.

The French Lick Scenic Railway also holds special events from The Polar Express, to Wild West Hold-ups, to the Movie Night Express where you'll experience a picnic and movie under the stars in the Hoosier National Forest.

The train slowed to a stop. Barnett reached for the microphone. "This is Cuszo, a town of 25. Walk around, but please do not try to visit the one business in town. They don't want us. In fact, they lock the door when the train arrives."

That business is a tavern. We watched as a kid tried the door — nothing tempts the curious like the forbidden.

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\*Percentage based on Polk U.S. heavy-duty pickup and class 2-5 Conventional Chassis Cab combined new registrations (2011 CYE - 2012 CYTD JUNE) within Emergency Vehicles, Mining/Quarrying, Construction, Petroleum, Metal Mining, Executive Legislative & General Government, Petroleum Refining & Related INDS MFRS, Electric Gas & Sanitary Services, Mining & Quarrying-Nonmetallic Minerals, Justice Public Order & Safety, Heavy Construction except Building, Forestry/Lumber Products, Manufacturing, Agriculture/Farm, Sanitation/Refuse, Agricultural Production-Livestock, Utility Services, Road/Highway Maintenance, Specialized/Heavy Hauling, Landscaping & Horticulture, and General Freight. \*\*Best-in-class maximum payload, towing, GVWR and GCWR when properly equipped. Class is Full-Size Pickups over 8,500 lbs. GVWR vs. 2012/2013 competitors.

# TRAILER LIFE

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