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TRAILER LIFE

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AUGUST 2015

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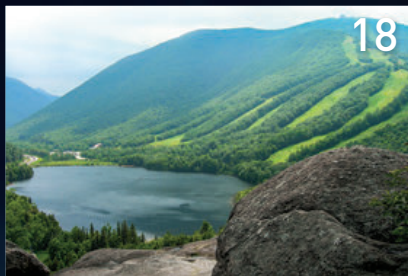
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There's plenty of slumber room in Venture RV's SportTrek 327VIK that sleeps 11. Page 12

On the cover: The Escape 5.0TA fifth-wheel cruises through the back country of British Columbia, Canada. Photo by Norman's Photographic

Smaller Trailers Don't Require Sacrifice

Adventurous souls have a different take on how to enjoy the heck out of the RV lifestyle



When it comes to RV ownership, “big” seems to be the operative word. Having a lot of room can be a good thing, especially for people who spend long periods of time traveling or have adopted a full-time lifestyle. But it’s fun to look back at our roots, at least for us old-timers. A 20-foot trailer with a gaucho-style couch, convertible dinette, basic galley and a place to shower was considered pretty comfortable — and gave us access to just about any place that resembled a campground. We’re now likely to hang out in nice RV parks, but my wife, Lynne, and I still relish discovering out-of-the-way places to camp, especially if they are streamside.

Being that I have always had a soft spot for compact RVs, I jumped at the opportunity to visit the Escape Trailer plant in Chilliwack, British Columbia. Truth be told, it was a great excuse to spend time in some of the nicest places in North America. Nevertheless, I concentrated on the job and learned all about Escape’s unique building process and the company’s mission.

After the factory tour and conversations with the owners, Reace and Tammy Harmatuik, I zeroed in on the 5.0TA fifth-wheel featured on page 40. Beyond cute, this diminutive fifth-wheel has much more to offer than just short dimensions; it’s fully equipped and equally as comfortable in an RV resort as it is in a Forest Service or Provincial Parks rustic site. Throw in the seamless fiberglass body, and this fifth-wheel will keep the elements outside where they belong and give adventurous souls a great home base.

Talking to potential owners and a couple taking delivery of a new trailer at the factory, it became obvious that Escape caters to active lifestyles. Seems like four-wheel-drives filled with outdoor gear are standard-issue tow vehicles. The people I talked with were also enthralled with the buying process, which is a perfect segue to this issue’s feature on factory-direct manufacturers on page 44.

Commonly, RVs are purchased at dealers’ lots where salespeople pitch the features and benefits. But there are a larger than expected number of manufacturers who sell factory-direct. The buying process here is much different. Buyers have access to factory personnel, even the owners of the company, and participate in the building process by adding personal touches normally not offered in production-run units. Factory-direct manufacturers may have learned to draw the line on eccentricity but for the most part are open to changes that are practical.

This type of versatility is what keeps the RV lifestyle exciting. 🚐

— **Bob Livingston, publisher**

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DID YOU KNOW?

The world’s heaviest watermelon, grown in 2013 by Chris Kent of Sevierville, Tennessee, tipped the scales at 350.5 pounds. August 3 is National Watermelon Day, one more reason to slice up summer’s iconic picnic fruit.

TRAILER LIFE

FOLLOW THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

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Getting Ahead on Meds

I missed the April issue's "Prescription for Travel" letter about the difficulty of filling prescriptions for painkillers when traveling but caught up with the "Doctor's Orders" letters in June. Have your readers considered a mail-order pharmacy? As retired military, we're serviced by Express Scripts, but an Internet search shows several others. I suspect they all operate in a similar manner.

Express Scripts is located in Arizona but will mail meds to all 50 states, including to a temporary address. My doctors fax them the prescription, and they fill it and mail it to me. I even have it set up for automatic refills. When the prescription expires, they contact the doctor for a new one. For new long-term prescriptions, the doctor writes two prescriptions: one for a 30-day supply, which I fill locally, and one for a 90-day supply, with refills, which goes to Express Scripts.

I hope this can alleviate some of the frustration for your readers.

Phil Clouser, Frankfort, Indiana



DIY Disc-Brake Installation

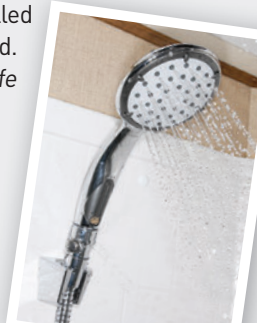
After reading Bob Livingston's "Whoa, Nelly!" in the May issue, I was so impressed with the Titan International disc-brake conversion kit, I had to have it. Being a backyard mechanic (you know the phrase — jack of all trades, master of none), I wanted to install this on my 2013 Redwood 36RL fifth-wheel. I called Titan, as its website did not show any dealers in Arizona. They provided me with contact information for their western sales representative, Mike Welsh. I talked with Mr. Welsh and was convinced even more that

Where's the Bracket?

After reading "Shower Power," Bob Livingston's June article about the Ecocamel Jetstorm showerhead, I decided to order one. After I received the handheld showerhead, I discovered that there was no wall-mount bracket included. I don't know what they expect a person to do with a handheld showerhead with no wall-mount bracket. I called Jetstorm's toll-free number and was directed to England. They tried to sell me a \$40 bracket. Where did *Trailer Life* get the bracket used in the article?

Dennis Schule, Midway, Arkansas

Bob Livingston replies: *I had a custom bracket in my shower that wouldn't fit the Ecocamel, so I went to the local RV-parts store and bought a \$5 generic bracket.*



this conversion kit would make my rig safer, especially with hauling my four grandsons around.

I called Redwood RV to get some technical information about my fifth-wheel's axles. Who better to know what was installed on my rig than the manufacturer? I provided them with my VIN, and they informed me that 7,000-pound axles were installed with a 8 x 6.5 stud pattern and that 1/2-inch studs were installed on the drums.

Mr. Welsh set me up with Elite Trailer Components, and I ordered the conversion kits, brake-line kit and BrakeRite actuator. It didn't take long to receive them, and I was off and running. I pulled the right side drums, double axles, and I immediately noticed that the studs in the discs appeared to be smaller than the studs in the drums. I confirmed this by slipping the lug nut onto the stud, and it slid down the stud without grasping a single thread.

I called Mr. Welsh, and he informed me that Titan would send out new conversion kits at no cost to me, even though the mistake was not theirs. (As I stated earlier, who better to know what was installed than the manufacturer?) I explained that new kits were not necessary, that if they sent 9/16-inch studs, I would

install them myself in an attempt to minimize their expense.

While waiting for the new studs, I mounted the new brackets for the disc-brake calipers, the BrakeRite actuator, the brake lines and the wiring to the actuator. The directions were simple and easy to follow. After receiving the new studs, it was time to drill the stud holes out to 43/64-inch, as the knurls were larger on the 9/16-inch studs. It was a breeze, and I finished my installation as easily as I believe Bob Livingston did. I think anyone could install these conversion kits if they are somewhat mechanically inclined as a DIYer.

Thank you for the excellent review, and a big thank you to Titan for its excellent product and outstanding customer service. I would recommend this product to all of your readers.

Mike Bonin, Wittmann, Arizona

Consumer Report

Neil Mullen's June letter, "It's a Blast ... Except When It's Not," really struck a chord with me. My wife and I are, like the Mullens, on our third trailer, and we travel with it as often as possible for two to three weeks at a time. I've come to accept the poor build quality as the penalty we pay for limited-production, semicustom units. But even when everything is working,

we are continuously asking ourselves, "What were they thinking?"

In spite of the fact that these trailers are built by companies that have many years of experience, on many different models, with identical components, they still mess it up. On our 2013 Evergreen Element ET26SRK, the water-tank vent is on the side of the tank. I can get only 18 gallons into a 25-gallon tank — the rest runs out on the ground. We have to reach behind the TV to turn on one set of lights and reach around the bottom of a set of ceiling-mounted cubbies to turn on another. We had to pay a shop to improve the airflow past the heat-exchanger coils so the refrigerator would cool. In hot weather, the fridge requires a fan to push the air past.

As consumers of expensive products of dubious build quality, we should demand that the industry as a whole do better.

Michael Morin, San Luis Obispo, California

Galactic Gearing

I always look forward to reading *Trailer Life* from cover to cover. While I enjoyed reading the "Transmission Transformation" article in the May issue, I was surprised to read the description for photo B on page 90. This description states that the sun gears and carrier are replaced with a heavy-duty unit. However, these are not sun gears but are planetary gears (most planetary gear sets have only one sun gear). The sun gear is not shown in this photo. It would be placed inside the planetary gears and would drive or be driven by them. The ring gear, also not shown, is around the unit and is meshed with the planetary gears as well.

The most famous use of a planetary gear set is on the Ford Model T where it provides two forward gears and reverse.

Duane Rose, Surrey, British Columbia

Going the Extra Mile

We purchased a new Open Range travel trailer from Discount RV Corner in Longmont, Colorado, on February 14, 2015. The sales staff was great to work with, along with the finance manager, but the real story started after we

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LETTERS

purchased the trailer.

We had used the trailer only two times when we brought it home the Sunday before we were leaving for Memorial Day weekend and two of the slideouts would not slide out. Instead of calling Discount RV on Monday morning, we drove straight there. To our amazement, the service department looked at it right away and discovered the gears were stripped. They had us leave our trailer and told us they would do their best to have it done before we left on Thursday. Before we got home, the service manager called and told us that two motors would be delivered Wednesday morning and we could pick the trailer up by Wednesday at noon.

Discount RV in Longmont, Colorado, went the extra mile to save our family trip. If you would like a great experience before, during and after a purchase of a trailer, try Discount RV in Longmont, Colorado.

Hodges Family, Loveland, Colorado

We travel the country doing volunteer work at church camps and children's homes. Recently, we were traveling through Buford, Georgia, when we encountered difficulties with our 2009 Jayco Eagle travel trailer. The shackles broke loose from the frame of the trailer, causing misalignment of an axle. This resulted in the two tires rubbing together.

We received great assistance from Willard Wrecker Service in Buford. The serviceman chained up the axle so we could slowly make our way to an RV repair shop. He followed us all the way there and blocked traffic for us to make a left turn on a busy street. Southland Motorhome Center and RV took over from there. They made the repairs in a very timely manner.

Both businesses were reasonable in their charges and "went the extra mile" to help during a stressful situation. We highly recommend both establishments to *Trailer Life* readers.

Larry Crone, Bentonville, Arkansas

We are full-timers in our seven-year-old fifth-wheel and just had the carpet replaced throughout the RV. It is very difficult to find someone who has the expertise of recarpeting an RV. ProSource Wholesale Flooring in Salt Lake City was wonderful in helping us choose the carpet and recommended Dan Brown as the installer. They were both so knowledgeable and are highly recommended.

Jack and Betsy Bray, Park City, Utah

We would like to let everyone in the Austin, Minnesota, area know what an honest, reliable, concerned and efficient business you have in Midtown Auto Clinic and Midtown Towing. My Good Sam Roadside Assistance allowed us to be towed to their shop when we broke down outside of Austin.

Peter Bartley, service manager, would do nothing less than evaluate all potential parts failures, then went on to give us parts at cost and reduce labor charges just to get us back on the road.

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quickly and safely. They set our trailer in their lot and pulled extension cords out to the trailer so we could watch TV while we waited. We were also told that we could stay there overnight if necessary, and one employee even offered us the use of his personal car if we wanted to drive around Austin.

We cannot say enough about the kindness and concern we were shown and how quickly they had us back on the road — the same day! Thank you again, Peter Bartley and Midtown Auto Clinic.

Al and Nancy Kopszywa, Corvallis, Montana

My wife and I started on our yearly road trip from San Diego to Camas Valley, Oregon. We spent a few days in Visalia, California, and on our last day, our air conditioner started to blow hot air. The unit was two years and one week old, so thinking the worst, we expected it was going to be expensive. This was Wednesday, and we planned to be in Camas Valley by Friday to celebrate my birthday with family.

I started making phone calls, first to Dometic, and they extended my warranty by 30 days — *great!* They also said that Camping World is an authorized repair facility. I called Camping World in Redding, California, and explained our situation to Brian Royce. I sent a picture of the information tags, and he had one in stock. It was Memorial Day weekend, but Brian said not to worry; he would figure out something.

On the way there, we noticed one tire on the fifth-wheel was looking narrow and round on top — what else could go wrong? It felt like the odds were stacked against us, and I was ready to call our family to say not to expect us until Saturday.

Brian went to bat for us, and by noon we were on our way to the tire shop, and by 1 p.m. we were on our way to Camas Valley. Thanks to Camping World and Brian's hard work, it was a birthday to remember.

Tony Aguilera, Spring Valley, California

Join the RV Conversation

I am considering the purchase of a new tow vehicle for my Heartland Edge toy hauler. I am thinking of a Jeep Grand Cherokee and wondering if a diesel engine would be justified for the extended range on a tank of fuel. It would be helpful if *Trailer Life* would provide a place on your website for readers to share their real-world experiences towing various trailers with various vehicles and what kind of mileage they get.

Ed Johnson, Longmont, Colorado

Check out www.forums.trailerlife.com to post RV-related questions, share insights and read comments from fellow Trailer Life readers and other RVers.

— Editors 🚐

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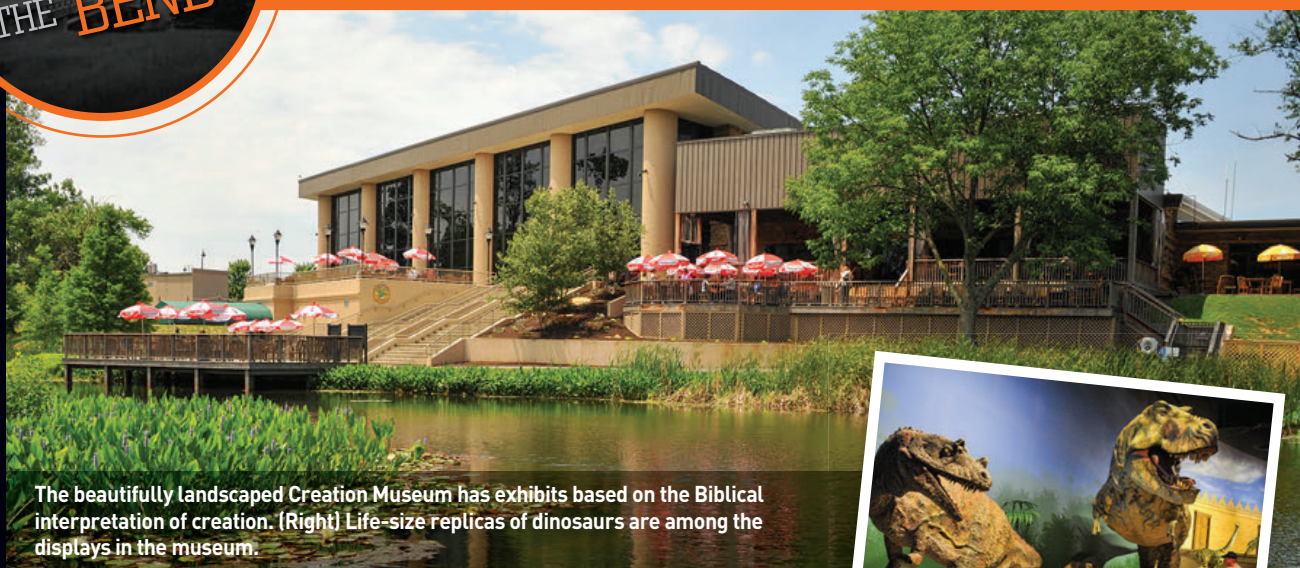
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The beautifully landscaped Creation Museum has exhibits based on the Biblical interpretation of creation. (Right) Life-size replicas of dinosaurs are among the displays in the museum.

Kentucky Eden

The Creation Museum in Petersburg brings the pages of the Bible to life and offers other attractions such as a dinosaur exhibit and planetarium article and photos by James Richardson

"Prepare to believe" is the slogan for the Creation Museum, located in Petersburg, Kentucky, near Cincinnati, Ohio. It is operated by the Christian creationist apologetics ministry Answers in Genesis (AiG) and was started to promote an explanation of the origin of the earth based on a literal interpretation of the Bible's Book of Genesis account of creation.

The museum is state-of-the-art, and within its 75,000-square-foot facility brings the pages of the Bible to life with more than 160 displays and exhibits. The funds to build the museum, which opened on May 28, 2007, were raised entirely through private donations. Ken Ham is president and founder of the Creation Museum and Answers in Genesis.

One of the first exhibits visitors see as they enter the museum is Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. As guests walk through, they learn how Adam named the animals, observe the Tree of Life, and of Eve taking a bite from that infamous fruit.

Another exhibit is Noah's Ark

Construction Site. It is a full-scale cross-section of the ark. The exhibit explains how Noah built the ark, shows his tools and explores how he and his family may have solved the problems of taking care of all the different kinds of animals in the ark.

The Creation Museum has excellent dinosaur-related exhibits, including dinosaur eggs and bones, plus realistic animatronic models. A dinosaur skeleton of an Allosaurus fragilis has recently been added. The museum's new dinosaur probably stood 10 feet high and was 30 feet long.

Within the museum are other attractions such as theater shows and the Stargazer's Planetarium. One show is a video presentation summarizing the six days of creation, as recorded in the Book of Genesis. Other themes of the theater presentations are Men in White and The Last Adam. The museum's restaurant is called Noah's Café, and the Dragon Hall Bookstore sells merchandise.

Outside, the Botanical Gardens has more than 500 varieties of plants.

There is a hummingbird and butterfly garden, a rainforest garden and swinging bridges. All the gardens are connected with a 5-foot-wide paved walkway, which is just under a mile long and can accommodate strollers and wheelchairs. A 5-acre lake within the gardens contains more than 6,000 plants and has a surrounding walking path. For the kids, there is a petting zoo, and for the more adventurous, 2½ miles of zip-lines and sky bridges traverse the property.

Located in North Bend, Indiana, within an easy 10-minute drive of the Creation Museum is Indian Springs Campground with 60 full-hookup sites, most of which are lakeside. Other RV parks can also be found near the museum.

Creation Museum

General information: 888-582-4253

Tickets and reservations:

800-721-2298

www.creationmuseum.org

Indian Springs Campground

This campground in North Bend, Ohio, is about a 30-minute drive from Petersburg and has 60 RV sites.

888-550-9244, 513-353-9244

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SportTrek Sleeps 11

For large families or those who just like a full house, Venture RV's SportTrek 327VIK sleeps up to 11. New for 2016, this three-slide, quad-bunk model is built for entertaining. A private bunk room is at an angle in the back portion of the travel trailer, off the kitchen, and sleeps six. It has a large closet, a table, its own entertainment center and a flip-up sofa.

In the kitchen, there's a large pantry and an island with a sink that offers lots of storage and is the focal point of the living area. There's abundant storage throughout with overhead cabinets and drawers in cognac maple.

Opposing slideouts house a three-burner stovetop with

oven, a microwave and a 6.3-cubic-foot refrigerator on the street side. Across the way, a dinette and 70-inch sofa offer seating for seven or



eight. Panoramic windows and an interior height of 6 feet 10 inches add to the large open floorplan.

The master bedroom has a queen-size bed, walk-around space, closets on both sides and solid-wood nightstands. There's access to the bathroom via two doors, one from the bedroom, and one near the SportTrek's entry door. The bathroom boasts a radius glass shower and a large linen closet.

Outside, two lighted Carefree awnings shade almost the entire SportTrek 327VIK's 35-foot 11-inch length. At the back of the trailer is the CampFire Café outdoor kitchen with a two-burner cooktop, a mini refrigerator and a sink. There's also a 40-inch LED TV and a Bluetooth DVD/CD/AM/FM/MP3 entertainment center. Base MSRP is \$35,600.

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



NEWSWIRE

FACTORY EXPANSION



Winnebago Towables Increases Production

Winnebago Towables, manufacturer of fifth-wheels and travel trailers, plans to increase production at its Middlebury, Indiana, plant.

The company purchased four facilities covering more than 277,000 square feet and plans to invest nearly \$250,000 in equipment during the next several years to meet growing demand. Winnebago currently employs about 2,800 people nationally and plans to create up to 150 new jobs by 2019.

"Northern Indiana is the epicenter of the RV industry,"

said Indiana Governor Mike Pence. "It's the home to nearly 85 percent of the nation's RV production and supports thousands of Hoosier jobs. And, because of the state's affordable business climate and experienced manufacturing workforce, it's great to see Winnebago choosing to create even more jobs here."

"We are pleased with the opportunity to grow our manufacturing footprint in Middlebury," said Randy Potts, chairman, chief executive officer and president of Winnebago Industries. "We greatly appreciate the support provided to us by the state of Indiana, Elkhart County and the city of Middlebury, and we look forward to continued growth and future success here."

SEMPER FI



Roadtrek Sponsors Veterans' Events

Roadtrek, manufacturer of Class B motorhomes based in Kitchener, Ontario, sponsors veterans' events in the United States and

Canada. The company's recent partnership with an annual Semper Fi Golf Tournament benefited wounded Marines and their families. The Semper Fi Fund, and its program America's Fund, provides immediate financial assistance and lifetime support to post-9/11 wounded, critically ill and

injured members of all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families.

"We are thrilled to be a sponsor for this event. It is a wonderful and fun day benefiting a very important cause, and Roadtrek is proud to be a part of it," stated Karyn Torcoletti, director of marketing at Roadtrek.

Jim Hammill, Roadtrek's president, said, "Roadtrek has several veterans' initiatives, including hiring preferences for qualified veterans of both U.S. and Canadian militaries in all areas of our business. It's simple for us: these folks put themselves in the line of fire to protect our way of life, and that gets priority from us."



Seal of Approval

Vote for your favorites in *Trailer Life's* fourth-annual RV poll

RVers tend to be a friendly bunch, eager to share their knowledge with fellow enthusiasts. To tap into that body of knowledge and share it on a grand scale, each year we conduct an online poll of readers' favorite RV brands and destinations. You're the RV lifestyle experts, and your experiences can smooth the way for others, so be sure to cast your votes in all 29 categories in our annual Readers' Choice awards program.

Voting is already under way at www.trailerlife.com/readers-choice. Take a few minutes to visit the website and tell us which vehicles, products and places make life on the road easier and more enjoyable. The deadline is September 18, 2015. We'll announce the gold, silver and bronze winners in each category in the January 2016 issue.

Camping Comes to Cook County

According to a press release from Forest Preserves of Cook County, Illinois, it has been more than 30 years since the area has been open to the public for camping. Now, tent campers and RVers alike have a place to enjoy the wilderness in Northern Illinois. Five campgrounds, three with RV accommodations that include electricity, will open this summer. Camp Shabbona Woods in South Holland was the first campground to open, and features cabins, tent pads and RV sites, special amenities, campfire programs, nature trails, the Sand Ridge Nature Center, and restrooms and showers.

Cook County has almost 70,000 acres of open space to fish, hike, bird-watch and canoe. Now RVers can camp year-round within steps of Bullfrog Lake, take a stroll through a campground surrounded by trees or kick back and enjoy the night sky. 800-870-3666, www.fpdcc.com

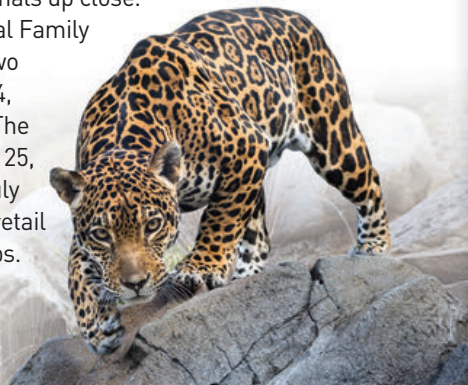
Jaguar Habitat at Los Angeles Zoo

A new habitat for three jaguars at the Los Angeles, California, zoo has opened, allowing visitors to see the big cats in a replica of their natural environment. The enclosure was designed for the specific needs of the jaguars, as were other animal enclosures that are part of a \$180 million Master Plan habitat that has transformed the zoo into a leading facility for animal care and conservation. The 7,100-square-foot jaguar habitat features a waterfall and pool in which the animals can swim, deadwood trees on which they can climb and abundant landscaping.

The facility has an 1,800-square-foot animal holding area for the two male and one female jaguars. The exhibit also offers two glass areas for upgraded viewing options that allow visitors to see the animals up close.

As an added summer bonus, a special Family Fun Fridays four-pack (two adults and two children) is available (online only) for \$54, which is \$12 off regular zoo admission. The tickets are available through September 25, 2015 for Fridays only (not available on July 3) and include a 10 percent discount on retail merchandise at any of the zoo's gift shops.

Los Angeles Zoo & Botanical Gardens
323-644-4200
www.lazoo.org/visit/familyfunfridays



The Air Race Is On in Reno!

The 52nd annual National Championship Air Races will be held September 16 to 20 in Reno, Nevada, at the Reno-Stead Airport. This year's performers include the Breitling Jet Team, the F-16 Fighting Falcon and the Commemorative Air Force's Tora, Tora, Tora Airshow. "Tora, tora, tora" were the words transmitted by Commander Mitsuo Fuchida on December 7, 1941, announcing the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The show and history lesson includes eight to 10 authentic replica Japanese fighter/attack aircraft and dive bombers. The airshow is intended as a memorial to all military personnel on both sides of the conflict who gave their lives for their countries.

The Breitling Jet Team from Switzerland will fly Czechoslovakian-made L-39C Albatros aircraft in unique formations and high-speed passes. They will also do a pyrotechnic finale. The F-16 Fighting Falcon, built to sustain 9G turns, will also show its prowess, and the public will be able to tour the Falcon later in the pits. There will also be a Drone Zone featuring unmanned aerial vehicles. Reno Air Racing Association 775-972-6663, www.airrace.org Shamrock RV Park in Reno, Nevada 800-322-8248, www.shamrockrv.com



PHOTO BY CURTIS NOBLE



Summer Fun in Springfield

The historic capital city of Illinois is celebrating summer with several events this August. Springfield, with its mix of history and culture, is home to the Downhome Music, Beer and Art Festival, August 7 and 8, and the Illinois State Fair, August 13 to 23.

The Downhome Festival features all local and original bands, food vendors, 100 craft beers and a kids' area. The Illinois State Fair is open from 7 a.m. until midnight, and features livestock shows, harness racing, auto racing, contests, exhibits and educational displays, a variety of food and top musical acts.

Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau
800-545-7300, www.visitspringfieldillinois.com
Double J Campground and RV Park, Chatham
217-483-9998, www.doublejcampground.com

St. Louis' Federal Reserve Museum

The interactive Inside the Economy Museum, located in the historic Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, Missouri, engages people in a learning experience that explains the economy through nearly 100 displays, videos, games and sculptures. The 4,700-square-foot museum is designed to teach young and old alike how the financial decisions influence the larger economy, how education affects future earnings and how standards of living vary. Visitors can participate in hands-on tactics, such as playing a trading pit game so they experience the high-adrenaline, quick-thinking life of a stock trader.

"The purpose of the Inside the Economy Museum is to help demystify the economy so that people better understand how it works and their role in it," said Karen Branding, senior vice president of Public Affairs at the St. Louis Fed. "The St. Louis Fed is a leader in promoting financial literacy and economic education, and the new museum is part of that commitment."

The museum is free and is open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on weekdays, excluding holidays.

Inside the Economy Museum
314-444-7309, www.stlouisfed.org/economymuseum
Casino Queen RV Park, East St. Louis, Illinois
618-874-5000, www.casinoqueen.com/rv-park.aspx



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Take the Floor

Two years after buying a new fifth-wheel, a South Dakota couple started having problems with the floor separating:

► We purchased a new Open Range fifth-wheel in January 2011. In early 2013, the plywood floor on the curbside slideout separated. The floor was replaced under warranty. Last year the floor of the same slideout separated from the wall, and there was a large gap. We took the fifth-wheel to Webster City RV in Iowa, and they contacted Open Range and submitted photos. Open Range agreed to pay for the parts but stated that the \$3,294.19 labor cost would be our responsibility.

We are very disappointed that our still relatively new trailer has had these problems. We now have deteriorating exterior decals and a separation at the corner of the bedroom floor as well. Open Range has a service bulletin about this last problem but will not pay for the repair.

Jo and Del Whitmer
Emery, South Dakota

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

On the Whitmers' behalf, RV Resolutions wrote to Highland Ridge RV, manufacturer of Open Range fifth-wheels. The company's warranty manager sent the following reply:

I advised Mr. Whitmer that the decision was made based on the fact that his camper was more than a year and a half outside the warranty period, and due to this, we offered the parts for the repair as a goodwill gesture. We have also advised Mr. Whitmer that we would be more than happy to sell him replacement decals at our cost for the decals that are fading.

Eric Burns, National Warranty Manager
Highland Ridge RV, Shipshewana, Indiana

After hearing from the manufacturer, the Whitmers followed up with RV Resolutions:

► Thank you for your efforts in trying to resolve this problem. We received a call from Highland Ridge that all they will do is cover the parts as a gesture of good faith and provide the decals at cost. We are disappointed and disillusioned. The parts are a small portion of the floor repair costs.

J. and D.W.



Pump It Up

When their truck's lube pump failed, a Northern California couple sought RV Resolutions' help in trying to recover the costs:

► We were on a trip to Oregon when we heard a sound from the lube-pump monitor, and my husband checked to make sure the pump was still working. It was. We were 40 miles from our destination. When the back wheels froze up, we had to have the pickup towed and have a new transmission put in at a total cost of \$4,100. We were confused because the pump was still working.

After the transmission was replaced, we took the truck and RV to Trailer and RV Parts Warehouse in Central Point, Oregon. They contacted Remco and talked to a technician who had them run multiple tests. In the end, Remco

refunded \$159.10 to our credit card, but I would like to get back some or all of the \$650 we're out for parts and service.

Doris Salinas, Victorville, California

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

RV Resolutions received the following response from Remco after sending the company a petition on Doris Salinas' behalf:

This letter is to confirm that the issues involving Doris Salinas have been resolved. I have attached copies

of a check in the amount of \$650 and the previous credit memo showing the refund of \$159.10.

Christy Ehnes
Returns, Remco Industries
Alexandria, Minnesota

Doris Salinas replied to RV Resolutions with the following thank-you note:

► I received a check for \$650 for the parts and service I was out. Thank you so much!

D.S.

NEED HELP? » RV Resolutions is a forum for the settlement of conflicts between consumers and RV dealers and manufacturers, accessory suppliers and service providers. After exhausting all other resources without success, please send a typed letter to *Trailer Life* RV Resolutions, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Include copies of appropriate bills and correspondence as well as a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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WAYFARING IN THE WHITE MOUNTAINS

A mother-and-son team hikes, bikes, paddleboards and zip-lines through New Hampshire's Mount Washington Valley and discovers rolling countryside, lakeside beaches and waterfalls spilling into pristine pools

As a lifelong skier and former resident of New Hampshire who has schussed the slopes of the Granite State's many ski areas for more than four decades, I thought I knew everything about ski areas in New Hampshire. But that was during the winter. Last summer, my 17-year-old son, Parker, and I took a road trip there, expecting to hike and play golf. After all, wasn't that what most ski resorts offered during the summer — and little else? How wrong we were, and how surprised to find more outdoor activities than we could possibly fit into our four-day visit.

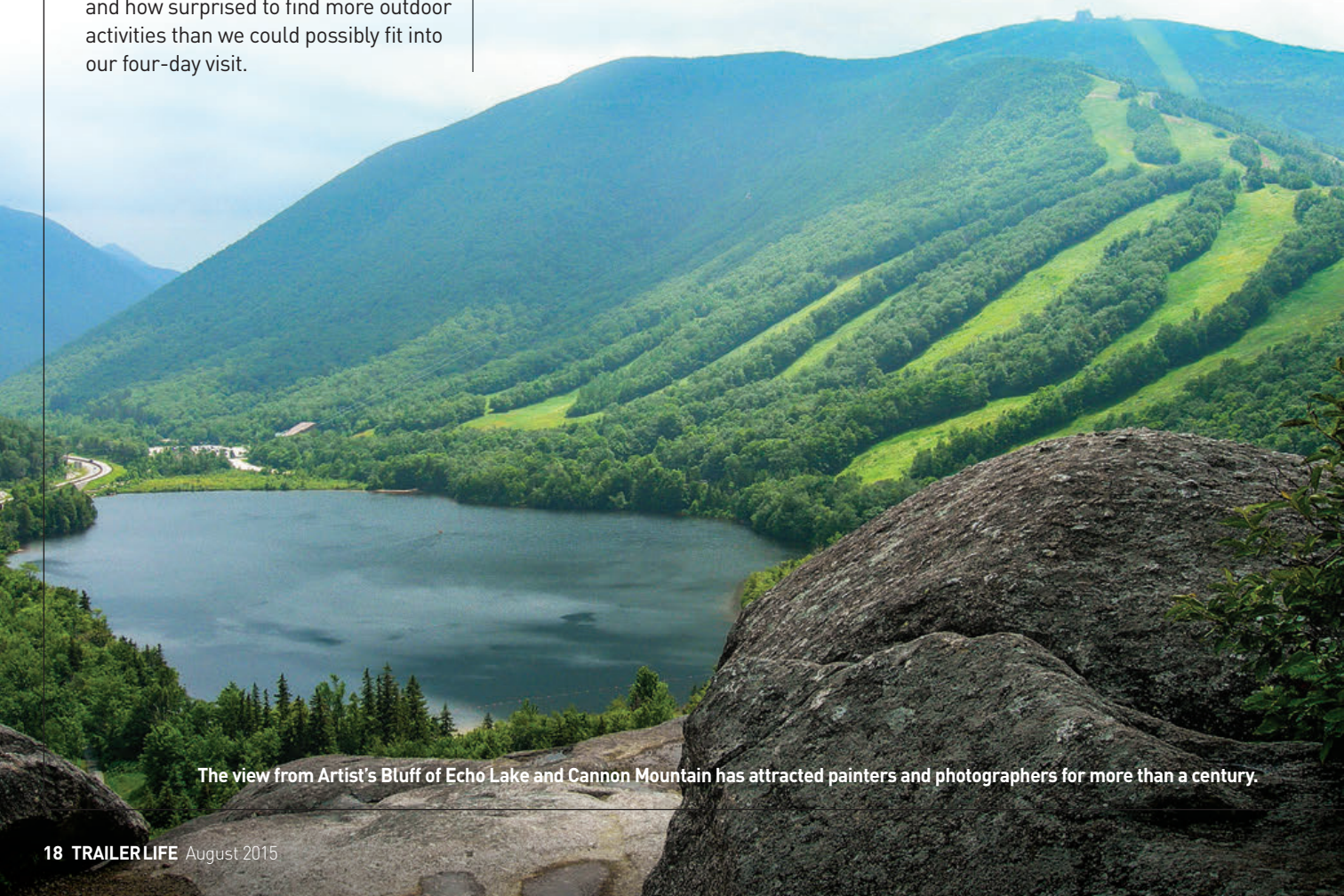
WATERVILLE VALLEY

Most of the ski areas in New Hampshire are in the White Mountains, within an hour of Interstate 93. We decided to cherry-pick our way north, ending up in the Mount Washington Valley near North Conway. Our first stop was Waterville Valley.

Waterville Valley was the brainchild of Tom Corcoran, an Olympic skier in the 1950s and 1960. Corcoran believed the key to a ski area's success was offering lots of user-friendly terrain,

as the bulk of the skiing population was at the beginner to intermediate level. The philosophy has carried over to the resort's off-season offerings, including paddling on Corcoran Pond in the middle of the resort and mountain biking on its ski trails.

My son and I were both neophytes at mountain biking, but with encouragement from Waterville's bike rental shop, we decided to give it a try. As instructed, we followed the resort's paved bike path to the bottom of a chairlift on Snow's Mountain near the resort's public golf course. I got on the chairlift, and then a helpful lift attendant loaded my bike onto the chair just behind me. Parker and his bike rode a couple of chairs back. With no one to talk to, I looked around from my aerial seat. Riding a



The view from Artist's Bluff of Echo Lake and Cannon Mountain has attracted painters and photographers for more than a century.



(Above) Mountain biking on one of Waterville Valley's trails. **(Right)** Crystal-clear water cascades into a swimming hole near the Waterville Valley's bike trail and **(far right)** taking the plunge!

chairlift up a mountain is one of the more pleasant ways to get a view. I relaxed, letting my feet dangle, and took a few photographs.

Once at the top, we weren't sure where to go, so we turned to a second lift attendant for advice.

"Take the Upper Snow's Mountain Trail," she coached us, "It's a wide, gentle descent and there's a great waterfall at the first bridge."

The "trail" was really a dirt road and not intimidating. We coasted down the path, winding through a dense hardwood forest and, when we reached the bridge, we got off our bikes to look at the waterfall. It was underwhelming. There had to be more.

I spotted a footpath to our left, which we followed, leaving our bikes at the



bridge. Within a few steps, we came to a taller waterfall that spilled into a deep emerald pool. The path continued down parallel to the waterfall but looked noticeably underused from that point on. Our curiosity whetted, we decided to explore further and quickly discovered several more waterfalls, each spilling into pristine pools framed by low, damp cliffs and the lush forest. We had wandered into a little-known Eden!

Parker immediately shed his shirt and



Many of New Hampshire's ski areas are accessible off Interstate 93 and are an easy day trip from any campground in the White Mountains.



(Above from left) Parker enjoys stand-up paddleboarding on Corcoran Pond at Waterville Valley. The rope bridge is part of the canopy tour at Bretton Woods. (Below right) Reveling in a thrilling zip-line ride over and through the trees at Bretton Woods.

shoes, and jumped into the chilly water.

"It's cold!" he spurted as he surfaced quickly, "But it's refreshing!"

An hour later, we finished our ride, excited by our discovery of the swimming holes and desiring another water-based adventure. After returning our bikes, we strolled the short distance through the resort's Town Square to the edge of Corcoran Pond, thinking that renting a pedal boat or a kayak would be fun, but another watersport caught our eye: stand-up paddleboarding.

"Have you ever tried one?" I asked Parker. I had paddled an SUP on a couple of occasions, but Parker had not. It seemed the perfect spot for a first-timer. The sheltered 6½-acre pond was ripple-free and uncrowded.

Parker swung his feet from the dock onto his board, gauged his balance and stood up. After a couple of wobbles, he gently pulled the paddle through the glassy water. Within a few minutes, he looked as if he had paddled an SUP his

whole life. I joined him, glad for the time on the water after our mountain bike ride. Afterward, we decided Waterville Valley should be renamed "Water-Filled Valley," since there are more opportunities to enjoy water in this mountain resort than one would expect.

CANNON MOUNTAIN

The next day, we continued north and found more water in Franconia Notch State Park. Stopping first at the Flume Gorge Visitor Center, we watched water gush from the base of Mount Liberty through the 20-foot-wide chasm, then moved on to our primary destination further into the park, Cannon Mountain.

The only state-owned and -operated ski area in New Hampshire, Cannon is also famous for the former Old Man of the Mountain, a rocky protrusion that, when seen from the side, looked like the profile of an old man. Though the Old Man of the Mountain tumbled to the valley floor more than a decade

"WHEN I FINALLY ZIPPED TO THE LAST PLATFORM AND UNCLIPPED MY HARNESS FROM THE SAFETY LINE, I FELT A MORE INVIGORATED AND BRAVER PERSON."



✓ TRAVEL TIPS

When to Go: Memorial Day (late May) through Columbus Day (mid-October) is prime time. The bugs abate by mid-July. The people abate by late August after schools reopen.

Be Prepared: In the valleys, summer temperatures during the day are typically in the 70s and 80s, and in the 50s and 60s at night. That said, it can snow on top of Mount Washington at any time, and

temperatures rarely crest 60 degrees on the summit. It can also be extremely windy. If you're planning an excursion to the top of Mount Washington (or if you plan to hike anywhere in the White

Mountains), bring a hat, gloves, at least one insulating layer and a waterproof-breathable shell. It's also very rocky on the summit. Wear sturdy shoes that cover your toes.



The cog railway takes visitors up Mount Washington, the highest peak in New Hampshire.

ago, it remains the state's most revered symbol, used on driver's licenses, license plates and road signs.

"Men hang out their signs indicative of their respective trades," said the great orator Daniel Webster, a New Hampshire native, referring to the Old Man of the Mountain. "Shoemakers hang out a gigantic shoe, jewelers a monster watch, and the dentist a gold tooth, but in the mountains of New Hampshire, God Almighty has hung out a sign to show that there He makes men."

The 40-foot-tall, 25-foot-wide rock formation, a series of five granite ledges, seemed to hang impossibly 1,200 feet above Profile Lake. And, ultimately, that proved true, because in 2003, the Old Man crumbled, a victim of thousands of years of erosion.

I asked Parker if he remembered the Old Man, as he was only seven years old when it fell.

"Of course, Mom," he replied, "Everyone in New Hampshire thought the apocalypse was upon us. I think it's funny how everyone still stops here to

see a pile of rocks."

We spent the rest of the day at the beach at Echo Lake, the other small lake at the base of Cannon Mountain. At one point, wishing to stretch our legs, we hiked the short half-mile from the beach to the top of Artist's Bluff, a rocky outcropping above the lake. Artist's Bluff afforded a spectacular view of the mammoth Franconia Ridge, which forms the dramatic wall on the east side of the notch and the steep Cannon Mountain ski slopes and tram on the west side. It's an historic overlook, so named because artists used to climb to it to paint the former Profile House, a popular hotel in Franconia Notch that was built in the 1870s but destroyed by fire in 1923.

BRETTON WOODS

On our third day, we saw another historic landmark dating back to the late 1800s, the Mount Washington Hotel, now part of the Omni Hotels group, and its ski area, Bretton Woods. The grand white hotel, which poses at the base of its namesake mountain like an opulent Spanish castle, is famous as the location where statesmen from around the world convened in 1944 to create the World Bank and International

PIT STOPS

RESTAURANTS

Coyote Grill, Waterville Valley

Eloquently presented local meats, dairy and produce in an unlikely place, above a fitness center, with views of Mount Tecumseh, Mount Osceola and Snow's Mountain.

www.wildcoyotegrill.com

Polly's Pancake Parlor, Sugar Hill

A breakfast must that serves up pancakes with real maple syrup and has a spectacular view of Franconia Notch. The gift shop carries a large assortment of local maple products and other unique items.

www.pollyspancakeparlor.com

Red Parka Steakhouse & Pub, Glen

A local favorite known for its barbecue ribs, prime rib and social atmosphere.

www.redparkapub.com

Woodstock Inn Station and Brewery, North Woodstock

Hearty family-style food and micro-brewery inside an historic train depot.

www.woodstockinnnh.com

SHOPPING

The village of North Conway is a mecca for shoppers with its outlet stores, local boutiques and art galleries. Even better, New Hampshire has no sales tax.

Bavarian Chocolate Haus

Handmade chocolate, fudge and other treats to satisfy even the most discriminating sweet tooth.

www.bavarianchocolatehaus.com

White Birch Books

A classic New England bookstore carrying books by local authors (you might meet one there), other local publications, cards and gifts.

www.whitebirchbooks.com

Zeb's General Store

An old-fashioned general store selling only New England products.

www.zebs.com



A hiker checks out the Tip-Top House, an historic shelter on top of Mount Washington that is built to withstand the strongest winds in the world.

WAYFARING IN THE WHITE MOUNTAINS

Monetary Fund. The resort's ski area, Bretton Woods, is New Hampshire's largest, with 464 skiable acres. It's also a luxurious basecamp for outdoor activities during the summer. Visitors can play golf and tennis, hike, drive or take a cog railway to the top of Mount Washington, the tallest peak in the state at 6,288 feet. There's also good fishing, horseback riding and rock climbing, or you can take the canopy tour, a series of zip-lines from the top of the ski area to its base.

Parker and I opted for the canopy tour, which has been compared to rainforest tours in Costa Rica except that it's through the boreal and northern mixed forests common to New Hampshire's White Mountains. After getting fitted with a harness, a helmet and a pair of leather work gloves, we followed our two guides to the top of the zip-line course with another half-dozen visitors. We learned the basics that included how to launch from a treetop platform, how to control our speed and how to land

(Right) An angler casts for trout on the Ammonoosuc River. **(Below right)** A hiker ogles Tuckerman Ravine on Mount Washington, a renowned hike-up ski slope that turns into an impressive cliff after the snow melts.

on a distant platform. Then we started down the zip-lines for real.

It was a thrill to fly from tree to tree. Each zip-line got progressively longer and faster as we descended the mountainside. At first, I imagined myself a Bond girl escaping evil henchmen. Then, on one of the higher cables, which crossed a broad ravine, I was an eagle soaring over the forest. Sometimes we had to repel off one platform to access another one. At one point, we negotiated a shaky rope bridge between two towering pine trees. When I finally zipped to the last platform and unclipped my harness from the safety line, I felt a more invigorated and braver person.

Parker unclipped next to me. "Wow, Mom!" he beamed, "That was cool!"



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NORTH CONWAY

The last day of our brief summer ski area tour, we planned to ride the mountain coaster at Cranmore Mountain Adventure Park in North Conway and then go horseback riding at Black Mountain in nearby Jackson, but awoke to rain. Instead, we hit several of the outlet stores in North Conway then headed south again, vowing to return soon. We never did play golf because there were just too many other things to do at New Hampshire's ski areas during the summer. 🚗

RESOURCES

Ski New Hampshire

A one-stop four-season reference to activities at all of New Hampshire's ski areas. www.skinh.com

Black Mountain: www.blackmt.com

Cannon Mountain: www.cannonmt.com

Cranmore Mountain Adventure Park: www.cranmore.com

Mount Washington Auto Road:
www.mtwashingtonautoroad.com

Mount Washington Cog Railway: www.thecog.com

Mount Washington Resort/Bretton Woods:
www.brettonwoods.com

Waterville Valley Resort: www.waterville.com

CAMPGROUNDS

Beech Hill Campground and Cabins

Grassy sites accommodate the smallest RVs to the largest in Twin Mountain and offer views of Mount Washington.
603-846-5521, www.beechhill.com

Cannon Mountain RV Park

In Franconia Notch State Park, this public campground has seven sites for RVs on the north shore of Echo Lake.
www.reserveamerica.com

Glen Ellis Family Campground

This full-service campground in Glen is close to the North Conway outlet stores and restaurants, and the cog railway up Mount Washington.
603-383-4567, www.glenelliscampground.com

Lost River Valley Campground

On the Lost River In North Woodstock, this campground

is close to the Lost River Gorge and Boulder Caves, a series of boardwalks and natural rock formations.
800-370-5678, www.lostriver.com

Tarry Ho Campground and Cottages

This Good Sam Park is located in Twin Mountain along the Ammonoosuc River, which offers good trout fishing or floating.
603-846-1026, www.tarryho.com

Timberland Campground

A big-rig friendly Good Sam Park with full hookups and spacious shaded sites in Shelburne.
603-466-3872, www.timberlandcampgroundnh.com

White Birches Camping Park

Pet-friendly campground in Shelburne with spacious sites and hiking trail access.
603-466-2022
www.whitebirchescamping.com

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ST215 / 75R14 - 6PR

ST205 / 75R15 - 6PR

ST205 / 75R15 - 8PR

ST225 / 75R15 - 8PR

ST225 / 75R15 - 10PR

ST235 / 80R16 - 10PR*

*3 ply sidewall construction

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UNDER THE IDAHO SUN

Tucked in the Sawtooth Mountains, the intimate winter ski town of Sun Valley shines

The community of Sun Valley is a tiny piece of paradise tucked into the majestic Sawtooth Mountains in the middle of Idaho. A gorgeous alpine resort oasis surrounded by towering peaks, Sun Valley combines small-town charm with big-city culture and activities while offering superb hiking and biking through thrilling scenery. My husband, Mark, and I have returned there many times with our 36-foot HitchHiker fifth-wheel trailer, and a recent visit reminded us once again that Sun Valley is a little bit of heaven on earth.

Until the Great Depression years of the 1930s, the mountain town of Ketchum (Sun Valley's next door neighbor) was a busy hub, first for mining and processing lead and silver, and later for sheepherding. The hillsides were rich with galena (lead ore), and wagons pulled by mules wove their way from mine to mine on steep, treacherous roads to deliver supplies to the miners and pick up loads of galena

to be processed back in town. When the mining boom faded, sheepherders arrived, and soon Ketchum was the top wool-producing town in the nation. By 1918, Idaho was home to some 2.65 million sheep, almost six times the state's human population.

Fortunately for tourists more keen on fresh mountain air than wool, Averell Harriman, the Union Pacific Railroad baron, decided to build up

the passenger side of his business in the mid-1930s by creating tourist attractions at the ends of his rail lines. He sent an Austrian count out on his trains to find a spot for a world-class ski resort, and when the count stepped off the train in Ketchum and saw the stunning alpine scenery, he knew he'd found the perfect place. In 1936, Sun Valley Resort opened to great fanfare among Hollywood celebrities looking for a chic getaway. Soon it was the "in" place to see and be seen.

Today, Sun Valley Resort throws its doors wide open in the summertime, encouraging visitors of all kinds to explore the exquisite grounds and get a taste of how the other half lives. The walls of the elegant Sun Valley Lodge are lined with photos of celebrities from



each summer with arts, entertainment, recreation, scenery and celebrity sightings

every era, and we enjoyed taking in the black-and-white pictures of Lucille Ball skating with her kids and a young Arnold Schwarzenegger getting ready to hit the slopes on skis.

As we wandered the streets of Ketchum and rode our bikes to the nearby town of Hailey, we heard endless tales of celebrity sightings and kindness. We were told of Bill and Melinda Gates tending to a fallen hiker on a trail, Warren Buffett offering a ride to a stranded local and Bruce Willis slapping down an enormous tip for a shopkeeper who opened up just for him on Christmas Eve. Everyone we met had

tales to tell of celebrities they'd brushed shoulders with.

Celebrities love the Sun Valley area because, even though it has an aristocratic resort at its heart and there are magnificent mansions all around, it is still an intimate small town where the rich and famous can disappear, if they wish, and become regular folk for a while. For the community of Sun Valley, the beauty of playing host to these ultra-rich guests and part-time residents is that they are generous with their

money, and the town benefits in spades.

The grand Sun Valley Pavilion is home to the Sun Valley Symphony Orchestra. The open-air venue was built to the tune of many millions of dollars

Sun Valley is a magical place for an RV road trip, with nearby commercial RV parks, public campgrounds and places to dry camp, including the private paradise shown above. (Right) An artist's canvas captures the scenic Sawtooth National Forest.



out of stone from the quarry that was used to construct the Roman Colosseum nearly 2,000 years ago. The Sun Valley Symphony is made up of top-notch musicians from many of the best orchestras in the country, and they give free concerts here almost every night in August. You can choose covered theater seating with a great view of the orchestra and fabulous acoustics inside the pavilion, or you can bring a blanket and enjoy a picnic on the lawn, listening to the music broadcast over enormous speakers while quaffing wine sold by caterers scattered throughout the grounds.

I am a softie for Brahms, and what a thrill it was to listen to an all-Brahms concert within arm's reach of the violin section. But these concerts are by no means a highbrow affair. When it was all over, the outdoor audience was absolutely delighted to see a little girl spontaneously jump up from her family's picnic blanket and put on an impromptu violin concert of her own, performing free-spirited, down-home country-fiddle music and singing along as she played.

Sun Valley is an active town that encourages visitors to join in the fun. Visiting cyclists are welcomed on the local club rides on the sweeping roads around town, and skaters can don blades to take a turn around the outdoor rink. We were quite thrilled when we opened our trailer door one morning to find our campsite surrounded by plein air artists working



The renowned Sun Valley Symphony performs free concerts throughout August, drawing appreciative crowds to the open-air venue — and inspiring young musicians.



on their easels in the Sawtooth National Forest. It turned out that Ketchum's Kneeland Gallery in town had invited their top 10 artists to come to Sun Valley for a weekend of painting in nature, and all around us artists were re-creating the breathtaking landscapes on their canvases.

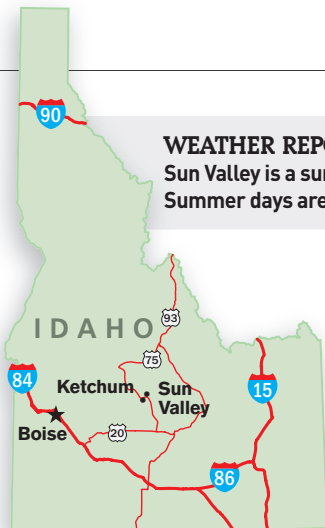
These beautiful works were then put on display at



(Left) Sun Valley Resort is as elegant as it is carefree, and visitors are welcome to enjoy the lovely grounds and distinctive assortment of shops and restaurants.



Whether hiking, biking or kicking back at a campfire in the evening, everyone can enjoy the great outdoors in Sun Valley and the surrounding Sawtooth Mountains.



WEATHER REPORT: At an elevation of 5,850 feet in central Idaho, Sun Valley is a sun-drenched paradise with a mountain-desert climate. Summer days are warm and dry, and the sun shines nearly nonstop.

Kneeland Gallery, and when we ventured into town to see these new paintings framed and hung on the walls, we discovered that on Friday evenings all the Sun Valley art galleries open their doors for an art walk. As we wandered between modern art galleries and photography galleries and a few filled with sculptures, we were surprised to be handed a free glass of wine every time we crossed a gallery threshold. I admit that by the fourth or fifth gallery, the subtle distinctions between the art styles and artists' motifs became a little fuzzy.

For those who aren't into the art scene but who get excited by fast cars, the annual Sun Valley Road Rally is an event not to be missed. When we saw the first edition in 2009, it was a small-time charity event to benefit the Drug Coalition, where locals could pay

\$1,500 per run to drive their cars as fast as they could on a 2-mile stretch of the Sawtooth Scenic Byway (Route 75) just outside of town. A family took the honors for the day with the mom, dad, son and daughter each taking a turn at the wheel of the family Porsche. The son hit a top speed of 188 MPH.

When we saw the Sun Valley Road Rally again recently, not only were the locals caught up in the fun, but six Bugatti Veyron race cars, valued at as much as \$2.7 million apiece, showed up from out of town to test their mettle. A handsome white one trimmed with black and gold walked away with the prize, hitting a top speed of 246 MPH on the slightly downhill and dead-straight course. The grin on the face of the young owner/driver at the finish line was infectious.

One of the best parts of the Sun Valley Road Rally is that spectators can hang out with the drivers in the staging area or at the car show the day before. My favorite aspect of this event is that people bring all kinds of crazy cars to race. A 1950s open-wheel hot rod hit 98 MPH. A 1957 Corvette convertible with the top down clocked 110 MPH. Cutest of all, and winning everyone's hearts



(Above) The one-of-a-kind Sun Valley Road Rally is a fun-filled race full of exotic cars and daring drivers, including (left) one spunky grandma.

SUN VALLEY CAMPING

The following RV parks and public campgrounds are within 30 miles of Sun Valley. All of the commercial parks are pet-friendly and have full RV hookups, Wi-Fi, showers and laundry facilities.

The Meadows RV Park, Ketchum

Located between Ketchum and Hailey, the Meadows is the closest RV park to Sun Valley Resort. 208-726-5445
www.themeadowsinketchum.com

Picabo RV Park, Picabo

Thirty miles south of Sun Valley, this Good Sam Park is within walking distance of world-class trout fishing on Silver Creek. 208-788-3536, www.picaborvpark.com

Riverside RV Park and Campground, Bellevue

A quiet mom-and-pop campground on the Big Wood River, less than 20 miles from Sun Valley. 208-788-2020
www.riversidervparkandcampground.com

Sawtooth National Recreation Area

The Sawtooths are loaded with exquisite places to dry camp for free for up to two weeks. The visitor center is 8 miles north of Ketchum on Route 75. 800-260-5970
www.reserveamerica.com

Wood River Campground, Sawtooth National Forest

Thirty dry campsites on paved loops next to the Big Wood River, 10 miles north of Ketchum. 877-444-6777, www.recreation.gov



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Whatever the season, the Sawtooth Mountains provide a majestic backdrop for all the exciting goings-on in Sun Valley, Ketchum and the Wood River Valley.

for sheer guts and enthusiasm, an 81-year-old grandma rocketed by at 166 MPH in her bright yellow Corvette, as the loudspeaker played "The Little Old Lady from Pasadena." The back of her T-shirt was emblazoned "Go, Granny, Go!"

Over at the outdoor skating rink, competitions of another kind were in full swing during our stay. Over one weekend, an amateur figure-skating competition was followed by a pro competition and ice-show tryouts. First, we watched a slew of eager little girls in pink bows and sequined skirts spinning and jumping before a row of very stern judges. A contingent from Hong Kong had come to compete, and I was amused as I congratulated a seven-year-old on the many medals around her neck to discover that she didn't speak English.

As soon as the ice was cleared from the amateur competition, a professional competition and audition took place. What a contrast it was to watch young adult skaters vying for roles in the major ice shows and competing with each other for best characterization, best comedy and best theatrics, rather than traditional figure-skating moves. We learned that when the skating rink isn't hosting competitions, there is an outdoor ice show every summer weekend that features some of the best amateur skating talent in the country, including the top national and Olympic contenders.

We thoroughly enjoyed all of these activities in town, but Sun Valley is located in some of the best mountain scenery the West has to offer, and we wanted to hit the trails and get out in nature, too. The Harriman Trail is a wonderful and easy two-track trail that takes mountain bikers past truly awe-inspiring scenery, and I found myself torn between riding my bike and stopping to take photos. The Lower Oregon Gulch single-track trail is a fast and slightly more technical romp past ever-changing mountain views. Much easier to ride but just as scenic, the communities of Ketchum, Sun Valley and Hailey share 30 miles of paved bike paths that wander up and down all over the place through both town and countryside. If you're not in a hurry, biking is the best way to get around the area.

Like much of the West, Sun Valley and the surrounding Wood River Valley have witnessed firsthand the horrors of wildfire, and a forest ranger told me that in 2013 the 178-square-mile Beaver Creek fire came frighteningly close to wiping out the entire town. Luckily, the fire was kept at bay, but the ravages and scars are still vividly evident in the forest. The Baker Lake hiking trail passes through some deeply scorched

parts of the national forest and is a sobering reminder of just how devastating fire can be. Yet, we found an eerie beauty in the charred tree trunks, and we felt a deep sense of hope and faith in nature when we saw hints of green and small flowers already blooming between the blackened roots.

Sun Valley, Idaho, is a glorious place for an RV trip, with dramatic mountain scenery and one of the most vibrant and energetic small-town communities we have found anywhere. It is an ideal blend of spectacular natural beauty and artsy cultural fun, and I know it won't be long before our trailer is headed there again. 🚐

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Sun Valley Resort

The official website for Sun Valley has the latest event information, maps and more to help visitors have fun in this four-season resort city.
www.sunvalley.com

Sun Valley Jazz and Music Festival

The 26th annual festival brings together 40 bands for five days, October 14 through 18, 2015. The Good Sam Club makes it easy for RVers to attend with dry camping at Ketchum's River Run Lodge and shuttles to the music venues.
www.sunvalleyjazz.com/goodsamclub

Sun Valley Road Rally

In North America's only event of its kind, spectators watch racers push their cars to the limit each July on a straight stretch through the Sawtooth National Forest. The seventh annual rally weekend takes place July 24 and 25, 2015.
www.sunvalleyroadrally.com

Sun Valley Summer Symphony

America's largest free-admission orchestra festival runs August 4 through 19 in a covered open-air venue with theater and lawn seating. The four-concert In Focus series takes place July 26 through 31.
www.svsummersymphony.org

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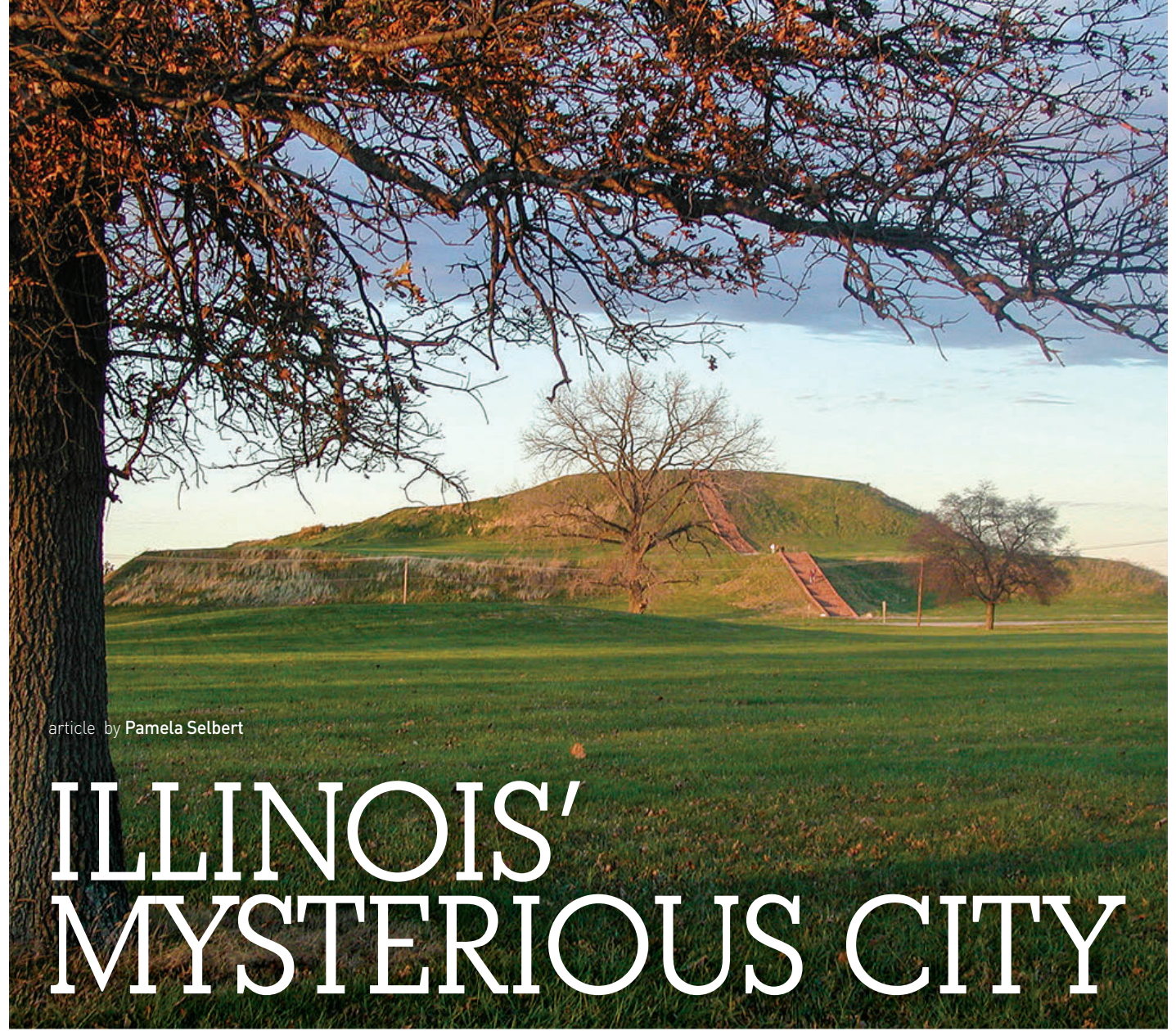
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article by Pamela Selbert

ILLINOIS' MYSTERIOUS CITY

At Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, just east of St. Louis, curiously sculpted earthen hills and ridges raise questions about the ancient residents and why they abandoned their town

The hundreds of thatched huts and wattle-and-daub buildings that once filled this wide river valley in southwestern Illinois are now long gone, centuries gone, and the dozens of grassy hills, seemingly so out of place on a flood plain and clearly not sculpted by nature stand silent. But if you visit the fine interpretive center to learn about what once

was here — the largest prehistoric Indian settlement north of Mexico — it isn't hard to imagine the lovely place bustling with activity.

At what is now Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, you can almost visualize early Native Americans going about their daily tasks: knapping flint for spearheads or bird points, shaping clay bowls, grinding corn into meal.

(Above) Monk's Mound in Cahokia State Park is the largest manmade earthwork of the ancient world. (Right) Archaeologists have identified the location of the calendar ring Woodhenge at Cahokia Mounds, re-created from ancient post holes. People from across the area gather here at the seasonal changes to celebrate.

PHOTOS BY GUY SELBERT AND COURTESY OF CAHOKIA STATE HISTORIC PARK

ILLINOIS' MYSTERIOUS CITY



fashioning cattails into thatch, toting baskets full of earth for building and dozens of other chores.

Archeologists say that would have been the scene here a thousand years ago at this Stone Age community of mound builders, 8 miles east of present-day St. Louis. Back then, some 20,000 people lived here (the first U.S. city to grow larger was Philadelphia, in 1800).

Nobody today knows what they called themselves or their town. But archeologists identify these early Native Americans as Mississippians, and the word Cahokia commemorates a subtribe of the Illinois Indians, who moved into the area in the 17th century but did not build mounds.

My husband, Guy, and I began our visit by spending several hours at the 33,000-square-foot interpretive center. A 17-minute film introduces visitors to this once-flourishing community that stretched across 6 square miles and was the center of Mississippian culture from about A.D. 900 to 1350. Dozens of exhibits explain life here, as historians have been able to piece it together.

According to the film, the area was first settled by Late Woodland Indians — predecessors of the Mississippians — around A.D. 700. A century later, and for the next 200 years, Mississippian culture developed as the community became highly structured with a complex political and social system.

The earthen mounds that would characterize the culture began to be built, a painstaking process to create rectangular platforms for holding important buildings, such as

(Above from left) Following painstaking research, several scenes from the ancient city have been re-created. Using descriptions of the Natchez villages in Mississippi and evidence gleaned from the site, artists William Iseminger and Michael Hampshire painted depictions of life at the height of the Cahokia civilization. The king, called the Son of the Sun, seen in the second panel, reigned from the top of the giant central mound (Monk's Mound) with absolute authority.

temples and residences for the head chief, or cone-shaped or ridge-top structures that marked important sites or were used for burials of high-ranking individuals. Originally, 120 mounds stood here; of the 80 remaining mounds, 70 are on state property.

The largest of these earthworks is Monks Mound, a terraced structure built (as all mounds were) one basketful at a time by Indians toting soil from nearby "borrow pits." Monks Mound, the largest prehistoric entirely earthen mound in the Western Hemisphere, and the 40-acre Grand Plaza stretching south of it, where important ceremonies were held, served as the hub of the community.

The 100-foot-tall mound, with a 14-acre base, is made up of some 22 million cubic feet of soil. It was named more



Visitors examine items at the gift shop in the Interpretive Center, which include many made by Native Americans.



GOING BACK IN TIME

Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site is located in Collinsville, Illinois, off interstates 55/70 and 255, across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Missouri. Self-guided tours are available year-round on three marked hiking trails and a 6-mile nature/culture trail. Guided tours are offered on select days from April through October (call for the schedule). Admission is free, although donations of \$7 for adults, \$5 for seniors, \$2 for children and \$15 for families are suggested. 618-346-5161, www.cahokiamounds.org



recently for a group of early 19th-century French Trappist monks who farmed the terraces and lived on a nearby mound.

Murals throughout the interpretive center depict life here around A.D. 1150, when Cahokia was at its peak. Glass cases exhibit a host of items such as stone tools, shell jewelry and pottery unearthed during excavations. Assistant Manager William Iseminger says less than 1 percent of the site has been excavated but notes that currently an archeological group from the University of Bologna in Italy is probing the plaza area.

One case displays a life-size Native American mannequin dressed in a loincloth and lying on a falcon-shaped array of marine shell beads. Iseminger

says it represents an individual, possibly an early chief, unearthed from a small ridge — named Mound 72 — that yielded 280 skeletons.

Other exhibits describe how the mounds were built or explain Cahokia's Woodhenge, a 410-foot-diameter sun calendar, a circle of 48 red cedar posts with a central observation post. The calendar was designed so that, from the central post, the rising sun would align with certain posts on the circle's perimeter on important dates, such as equinoxes and solstices. Woodhenge

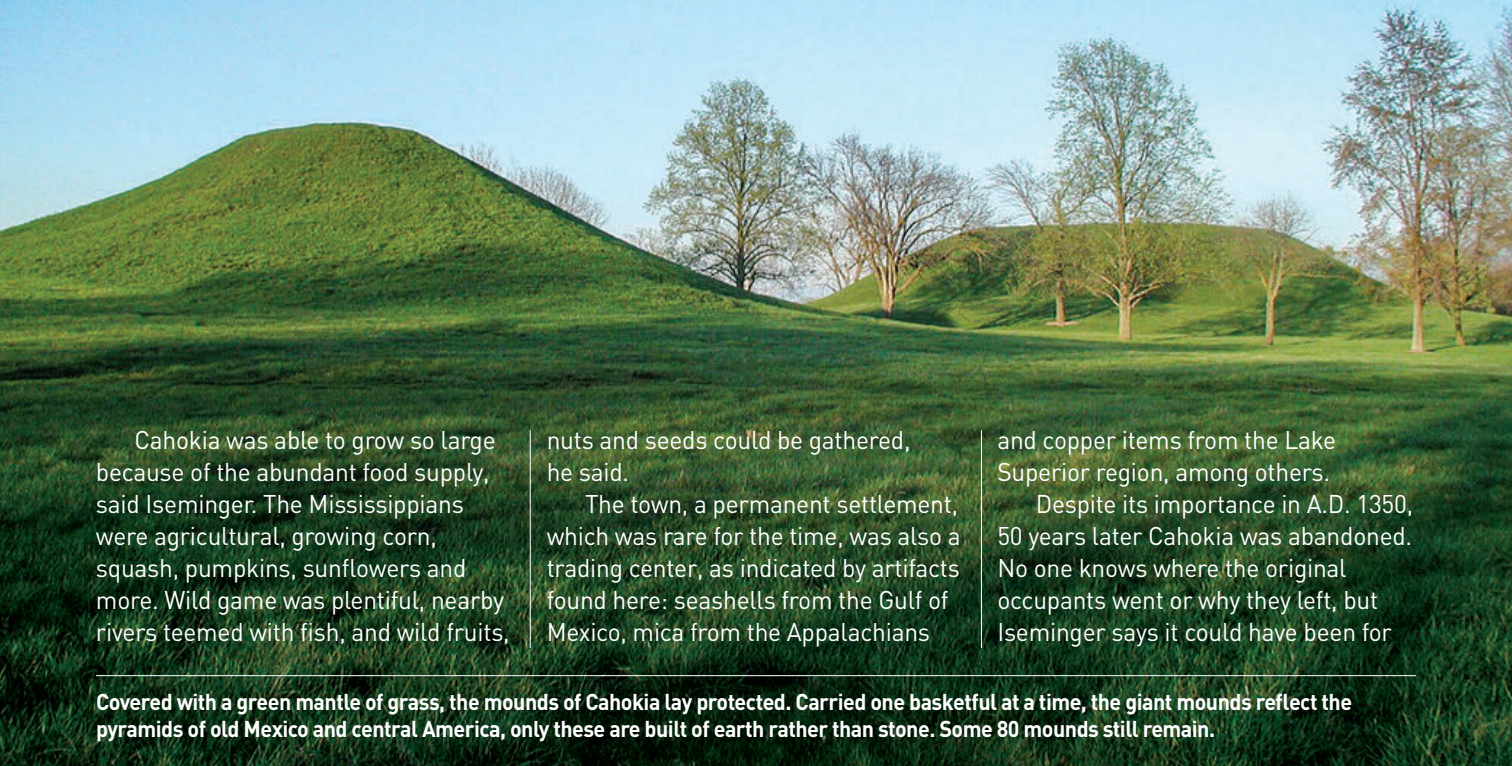
has been reconstructed, and every year the park holds observances for the public on these occasions (call for dates and times).

Most dramatic of the exhibits is a 1,200-square-foot diorama made up of full-size thatched huts, a sweat lodge, a granary and more than a dozen life-size adults and children at work or play (each person was cast from a living Native American, Iseminger says). The high ceiling and two-way mirrors make the replicated town seem enormous.

CAHOKIA WAS DESIGNATED A WORLD HERITAGE SITE "FOR ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN THE PREHISTORY OF NORTH AMERICA"



Cahokia is an ongoing research project. Here students and volunteers carefully peel back the layers of earth like layers of time, hoping to reveal the past to the present.



Cahokia was able to grow so large because of the abundant food supply, said Iseminger. The Mississippians were agricultural, growing corn, squash, pumpkins, sunflowers and more. Wild game was plentiful, nearby rivers teemed with fish, and wild fruits,

nuts and seeds could be gathered, he said.

The town, a permanent settlement, which was rare for the time, was also a trading center, as indicated by artifacts found here: seashells from the Gulf of Mexico, mica from the Appalachians

and copper items from the Lake Superior region, among others.

Despite its importance in A.D. 1350, 50 years later Cahokia was abandoned. No one knows where the original occupants went or why they left, but Iseminger says it could have been for

Covered with a green mantle of grass, the mounds of Cahokia lay protected. Carried one basketful at a time, the giant mounds reflect the pyramids of old Mexico and central America, only these are built of earth rather than stone. Some 80 mounds still remain.

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(Above from left) The excellent Interpretive Center at Cahokia and its magnificent bronze entrance doors depict scenes from the ancient city.

a variety of reasons: Mississippi River floods, extended droughts, political changes or internal conflicts.

Over the years other communities came and went. Up until the early 20th century, as the land was cultivated or sold for fill dirt elsewhere, many of the mounds were destroyed. It was apparent that if something wasn't done to protect them, Cahokia's mounds and rich history would be completely lost, Iseminger said.

In the 1920s, 144 acres were set

aside as Cahokia State Park, and over the next 75 years more land was purchased, creating the 2,200-acre historic site of today, which will continue to grow as funds become available.

Cahokia was made a U.S. National Historic Landmark in 1965, and 17 years later, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated it a World Heritage Site "for its significance in the prehistory of North America." A few years after that, the current red-and-

CAMPING NEAR CAHOKIA MOUNDS

This region has plenty of RV parks to choose from, including the following two in southwestern Illinois and another two just across the Missouri border in St. Charles.

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618-332-7700

www.cahokiarpark.com

Casino Queen RV Park, East St. Louis, Illinois (Good Sam Park)

800-777-0777

www.casinoqueen.com

RV Marquette, St. Charles, Missouri

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www.rvmarquette.com

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Life-size dioramas in the Interpretive Center depict life for the average citizen of this largest native city north of Mexico.

yellow-brick interpretive center was built "to complement the mounds but not compete with them," Iseminger said.

Today, Cahokia hosts more than 300,000 visitors every year, many of whom climb the 156 steps to the grassy top of Monks Mound for spectacular views of the surrounding countryside. To the south is the emerald-hued Grand Plaza. To the east are a dozen or so mounds and the partly rebuilt stockade, originally 2 miles long, that enclosed the ceremonial part of the city. And to the north, barely visible through the trees, stretches Interstate 70. Most dramatic is the view to the west, high over nearly a dozen more mounds to the 20-foot-tall posts of Woodhenge, and far in the distance across the river, shrouded in the turquoise mist of early evening, the cluster of high-rise buildings and the impressive Gateway Arch of St. Louis. 🚗



FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Illinois South Tourism Bureau can fill you in on dozens of other area attractions, including Bryant's Miniatures (Norris City) where visitors can tour a training facility for miniature horses and Shetland ponies, Eckert's Fun Farm (Millstadt), Gateway Fun Park (Collinsville), Little Toot Railroad (Flora), Popeye Character Trail (Chester) and Willoughby Heritage Farm (Collinsville).

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The Great Escape

A molded fiberglass body seals this unique, fully equipped fifth-wheel from the elements while projecting an aura of durability and adventure

Bigger is better," seems to be the mantra these days, as the RV industry responds to consumer demands for trailers and fifth-wheels with high-livability factors. Lightweight materials and modern building practices have allowed manufacturers to churn out a plethora of larger trailers that not long ago would have enthusiasts scratching their heads as to the wisdom of such lengths. Not everyone wants big, but few want to sacrifice livability, comfort and quality.

Those who gravitate to smaller trailers are usually more adventurous and relish destination freedom or simply are not enamored with material things and opulence. Escape Trailer Industries in Chilliwack, British Columbia, thinks it can satisfy both types of buyers with one highly maneuverable fifth-wheel.

Escape entered the RV scene in 2003 with a diminutive 17-foot fiberglass travel trailer. It was nothing fancy, but it did get the occupants off the ground with a moderate level of

creature comfort. In only 12 years, the company has made a science of building 100 percent molded fiberglass bodies and today offers highly upgraded trailers without abandoning its roots. The bread-and-butter trailers for the company are its 19- and 21-foot travel trailers, although the 13- and 17-footers are still popular models in the lineup. But we were intrigued by the Escape 5.0TA fifth-wheel, which made its debut in its current form last year.

In the eyes of conventional fifth-wheel owners, the 5.0TA has itty-bitty status. Don't let the compact stature fool you; this is a full-featured fifth-wheel, sans the expansive floor space or slideouts. It's just what the doctor ordered for those who prefer to engage in outdoor activities without being hampered by maneuverability issues, enjoy rock-solid towing manners and still want a place to sleep, take a shower and lounge without contracting





terminal claustrophobia.

The key to making the interior work for a couple or even a family of four is proficient space utilization — and the fact that the inherent “cabover” formed by the fifth-wheel body provides a natural out-of-the-foot-traffic location for the 60- x 80-inch queen bed with an 8-inch coil-spring mattress. There are many large fifth-wheels and travel trail-

(Above left) The galley is surprisingly spacious with plenty of room to prepare meals, and foodstuffs will easily store in cabinets and drawers. The rear dinette seats four in comfort. **(Above right)** The queen-size mattress fills most of the front bedroom, but windows and good headroom mitigate any closed-in feeling.

ers that don't even have full-size queen beds. Of course, in the Escape, the mattress fits snugly in its elevated quarters, but there's still a little room on each side, and the surrounding overhead

cabinets and nightstand cubbyholes add perfect symmetry to the bedroom. LED reading lights, side windows and a 13- x 20-inch roof hatch round out the up-front accouterments.



The Ford EcoBoost made easy work of towing the Escape fifth-wheel. This compact combo is ready for adventure.

Descending the three steps from the bedroom, the occupants will pass a bigger-than-expected wardrobe on the street side and an opposing catchall shelf with a cabinet above and a drawer in the lower portion of the structure. At the bottom of the stairs is the entryway landing area, which leads to a wet bath. As far as this bath goes, “function” is the operative word, and users should be satisfied with the space for showering or sitting on the throne, even though it’s tight. Don’t expect shelves or a cabinet, and the sink is basic but workable. Users can easily add waterproof baskets that are hung by large suction cups for storing toiletries. Fit and finish inside this bath are exceptional, and there are no gaps in the walls to allow water seepage. The shower wand could be improved (the hose is too rigid), and the optional foot-flush toilet (\$60) is a must-have.

Adjacent to the bathroom is a structure that terminates at the rear dinette. The 6.7-cubic-foot refrigerator takes up the majority of this space, but there’s additional room for fairly large cabinets, the furnace and optional microwave oven (\$85). Frankly, the builders have shoehorned a lot of cabinet space in such a compact fifth-wheel. Supporting that accolade is the surprising network of cabinets and drawers in the galley area. Here, there’s a single sink with a long-neck faucet, a two-burner cooktop and a roomy countertop made of optional custom Formica. Large cabinets above the counter can hold plenty of foodstuffs.

The last interior component inside this fifth-wheel is the dinette, which easily seats four people. Since the table



(Above left) The wet bath is small, but it gets the job done. **(Above right)** A landing area in front of the entry door leads to the upper bedroom via three short steps. An optional TV is mounted on a swing-arm attached to the cabinet structure adjacent to the door. The shelf below the TV is a suitable catchall for small everyday items.



is large and the interior is narrower than most fifth-wheels, the table rides on a slide mechanism that allows it to glide effortlessly side to side, providing access to the seats. It’s a pretty smart arrangement, taking advantage of a big table to prevent dinner-plate banging.

Large windows surrounding the dinette offer a commanding view of the outside, and lots of stuff can be stashed in the spacious overhead cabinets. When the dinette is converted to a bed, there’s enough room to sleep two people on the 4-inch high-density cushions.

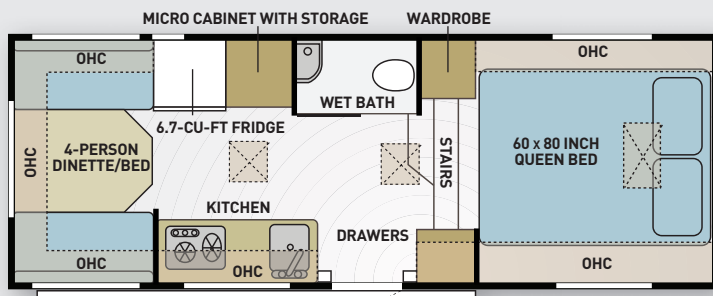
The fifth-wheel is well insulated using foam panels before installing the cabinetry and vinyl headliner and wall

covering, which further improves the R-factor. Thermal windows with extra insulation can be optionally added for those looking for year-round versatility.

While convenience in a small package is certainly a big selling point, the overall theme of this fifth-wheel is durability. The entire body is fabricated using a two-piece fiberglass shell. The upper and lower halves are molded using a hand-laid process, and they are bonded together before the shell is released from the mold and bolted to the frame. Strategically located anchor blocks are placed in the mold for attaching the interior walls and cabinetry. When the interior components are attached to the fiberglass, the entire structure becomes even more rigid. The result is a solid one-piece body that is strong and waterproof — and with proper care, will last a very long time.

There’s nothing square about the exterior lines. Rounded corners offer crowd-pleasing aesthetics while adding a large element of aerodynamics. The body is mounted on a rubber torsion independent suspension that is said to be maintenance-free. Fifteen-inch tires improve ground clearance, something that those venturing off the pavement

ESCAPE 5.0TA



will appreciate. A full-size spare is also included, and a 2-inch hitch receiver can be ordered for those who carry bicycles or other outdoor gear.

Large tinted Hehr windows, LED marker and taillights, and the curved aircraft-style door (with retractable screen) contribute to the overall look, which has a real ready-for-adventure appeal with the addition of the patio awning, stylish wheels and rooftop air conditioner. Owners who stay out for a while will also appreciate the larger-than-expected storage capacity in the side and front exterior compartments.

Beyond the inherent dynamics of the fiberglass body, the Escape 5.0TA has a wet weight of only 4,390 pounds, which makes it easily towable by compact trucks. During our evaluation, we towed the fifth-wheel with a Ford F-150 with the new aluminum body and EcoBoost V-6 engine. Obviously, a truck rated to tow more than 11,000 pounds (depending on equipment) made easy work of pulling the lightweight Escape, but it was nice to have the get-up-and-go to maneuver in all traffic conditions — and climb mountain roads with smiles on our faces. The fifth-wheel can be towed with shortbed trucks, but a parking-lot test should be performed to make sure the combo can be turned 90 degrees; it could not with the F-150, but it was very close.

Since Escape trailers are factory direct, customers have the opportunity

to become more involved in the ordering process. The company does not build units for inventory; each trailer is built to order. That being the case, delivery will not be immediate, but customers can spec out a trailer to meet their exact needs. The option list is extensive, even though the number of stock factory amenities will easily meet one's basic self-containment needs.

Picking up a new unit at the factory will require a trip to Chilliwack, but that just gives you a good reason to visit a beautiful place with great campgrounds in the area. For those who can't get away, the company may be able to arrange delivery by piggybacking sold units going to other people en route, which could save buyers some money.

The concept of a fully equipped 21-foot fifth-wheel that can go anywhere is exciting. RV enthusiasts wanting to downsize, whether to scale back for simplicity and/or ease in handling, and those who are lured to more off-the-beaten-path adventures will find that the Escape 5.0TA is a great alternative to "big" without sacrificing comfort and convenience. Those who prefer to tow with an SUV can look to the 21-foot travel trailer without really giving up interior space or handling characteristics.

Escape backs its trailers with a two-year warranty, and U.S. customers get the advantage of a positive currency exchange (as of press time). 🚚

SPECIFICATIONS

ESCAPE 5.0TA

Exterior Length	21' 2"
Exterior Width	7' 4"
Exterior Height	9' 7"
Interior Width	7' 1"
Interior Height	6' 4" to 7'
Construction	Molded fiberglass body, foam insulation
Freshwater Cap.	28 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	30/28 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.
Water Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	6.7-cu-ft, three-way
Furnace	12,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	11,000 Btu
Converter	55 amp
Battery	(1) Group 27, 12 volt
Tires	ST205/75R15
Suspension	Rubber torsion independent
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no cargo)	4,390 lbs.
Hitch Weight	620 lbs.
Axle Weight	3,770 lbs.
GVWR	5,500 lbs.
GAWR	2,300 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	1,110 lbs.
Base MSRP	\$30,300 (CD)
As-Tested MSRP	\$33,912 (CD)
Basic Warranty	Two years

Escape Trailer Industries

855-703-1650, www.escapetrailer.com
Circle 135 on Reader Service Card



DIRECT H

Buying an RV directly from the factory allows customers to become more involved in the process

The RV purchasing process is rife with choices: which vehicle type, which floorplan, which fabric color, which sofa bed. These are all essentially of equal importance; as a buyer, you're making a substantial investment in a recreational vehicle, and it should be delivered as you like it. But when you're buying through a dealership, choices can be limited to aesthetics or basic add-ons, leaving things like tank capacities and layouts to the mercy of the manufacturer and its "options" packages. Then there's the additional cost the manufacturer is required to pay to the dealership. To make it profitable for both dealer and manufacturer, the purchase price can contain markups in the thousands.

Prospective buyers ready to lay down the monetary equivalent of a vacation home don't have to settle: they can choose to buy their new RV directly from the factory. Among many other benefits, buying factory-direct can give consumers more bang for the buck.

"The most important advantage

of buying factory-direct is the reduced cost," said Marsha Trautman, president of custom fifth-wheel builder Space Craft Manufacturing. "You are not paying the dealer to sell you the product."

That sentiment is echoed across the factory-direct board. "The most obvious benefit is that we have eliminated the middleman," said Tammy Harmatuik, business manager for Escape Trailer. "This allows us to keep the costs down."

To their credit, most manufacturers that utilize the dealership model have a good handle on their customer base and are able to offer some combination of features to satisfy most potential buyers in that area. However, that still leaves a considerable amount of "settling" for what's available.

"We hear too often that previous experiences of ordering an RV through a dealer have resulted in the [RV] coming in not like they thought it would be," said Phil Brokenicky, president and CEO of custom-trailer builder New Horizons. "By then, it is too late to



New Horizons offers a variety of custom configurations on the manufacturer's own proprietary chassis. Aluminum framing surrounded by fiberglass walls and roof help with aesthetics and longevity.



BARE BONES

Class B luxury begins with this one-piece shell from Coach House, one of a handful of RV manufacturers that offer factory-direct sales.

ITS



change it, and the customer just has to live with it," he said.

"Buying factory-direct allows the manufacturer [to produce] a higher-quality product with higher-end components at an advantageous price," said Brian Shea, owner and founder of the RV Factory, which manufactures the new Avion trailers. "The attention to detail, with a degree of customization, means we can allow a customer to have exactly what they want."

This, of course, includes changing

up designs to suit the vehicle's intended use. "Everyone has a different style of camping and different requirements based on that style," said Escape's Harmatuk. "The customers can even provide personal items for installation during production, as long as they are CSA [safety] approved."

Regardless of how convenient it may be to purchase from the local dealership, settling for something that isn't what you had in mind can result in a case of buyer's remorse,

especially when the price can quickly rise to six digits. But if you take your time and do some homework up front, you can find a number of factory-direct manufacturers who sell directly to the buyer — many of them custom-trailer manufacturers.

Buying factory-direct is a process; it's not a decision made on a Friday and expect to be camping the following weekend. "Most buyers start months or even years before they arrive at our door," said Paul Meyer, president of

Buying factory-direct enables customers to personally select flooring, furnishings, countertops and cabinetry, as is the case in the New Horizons fiver pictured on the right.

Class B manufacturer Sportsmobile. "Most already have a good idea of what they want and how we can help. I'd estimate that 90 percent of potential customers make an appointment to sit down for a couple hours to design their conversion and get an estimate."

It's that face-to-face interaction that is so important in the factory-direct process. "It opens a direct line of communication for questions, warranty and customer service, and we think that gives the customer a more personal, comfortable and intimate experience in our industry," said Steve Garzeny, vice president of Class C motorhome manufacturer Coach House. "Our goal is to educate the customer so they can make intelligent, informed decisions."

Others in the factory-direct business agree. "We listen to our customers, and being factory-direct allows us to do some custom design and make changes quickly without



PHOTO BY SCOTT HIRKO

going to some corporate headquarters," said Earl Robbins, sales manager for Class B manufacturer Phoenix Cruiser.

Plus, being so involved with the manufacturer during the planning and construction process helps provide clarity to some of the problems that stem from having a dealer be

The factory-direct process can go a long way toward building trust between the manufacturer and customer.



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(Right) The factory-direct process allows manufacturers to utilize improved construction techniques, such as upgraded insulation. (Below) Many companies allow factory tours; this Class B is in the finishing stages of construction. (Left) The interior of the RV Factory's all-new Avion Azure is upscale and functional.



your point of contact.

"When buying factory-direct, you have the luxury of speaking with the people who have built your new home," said Space Craft's Trautman. "How many times have you asked a dealer how an item works in a trailer only to have them tell you they don't know? That does not happen when you buy factory-direct," she emphasized.

New Horizon's Brokenicky agrees. "The most significant advantage to the consumer of factory-direct buying is dealing with the people who build their unit," he said. "This

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DIRECT HITS

Canada-based Escape Trailer utilizes two-piece fiberglass shell construction for its factory-direct trailers. The Escape 5.0TA comes with a queen bed, a 6.7-cubic-foot refrigerator, natural oak cabinetry and a long list of other features.

aids the communication process.”

“Any time we better meet the needs of our customer, it’s good for business,” said Annie Stein, director of sales and marketing for Xpedition Vehicle manufacturer EarthRoamer. “Selling factory-direct allows us to really get to know each owner individually and provide a level of customer service that is unmatched in a dealership environment.”

The royal treatment often continues even after the vehicle is built, with manufacturers offering red-carpet deliveries, online forums and, perhaps most importantly, extensive aftercare programs. Most even take extra steps to make sure the new owners have a complete understanding of how their vehicle works.



This contrasts to the typical dealership experience, where impending sales and a vast collection of different models can overwhelm a salesperson, and the walkthrough with the customer may last only an hour or two.

“We give the customer a three-day orientation at the [New Horizons] factory, during which time they are living in their new unit,” said Brokenicky.

It’s definitely a trend among



Don’t be fooled by the EarthRoamer’s upscale interior (left); these Xpedition Vehicles are valued for their aggressive off-the-beaten-path performance — and comfort and convenience.



HAVE IT YOUR WAY

Buying factory-direct lets you have a hand in designing your RV. “We know what questions to ask the customer so they think through how they want their RV to be designed, equipped and decorated,” said Phil Brokenicky of New Horizons. “We don’t offer the brown, green, blue or black color scheme — we offer thousands of color choices,” said Marsha Trautman of Space Craft. “You choose the floor covering, wall covering, Corian countertop, window treatment, upholstery fabric, cabinetry wood and color ... down to the cabinet door pulls.”



factory-direct manufacturers. “We offer to have all our customers stay a day or two with us to make sure that they understand how to operate everything,” said Phoenix Cruiser’s Robbins.

Not to be outdone, Meyer said, “We set [Sportsmobile buyers] up in a campsite for a few days for a shakedown trip. They always leave with a smile.”

By the time the vehicle is delivered, the customers and the manufacturer often know each other like family, so it makes sense to continue that close relationship for years to come. “We take pride in getting to know our customers, educating them, keeping in touch after the sale, and because we are factory-direct, we are the only call they need to make should they have questions, warranty issues, comments, etc.,” said Garzeny of Coach House.

In addition to offering RV-service-center authorization to most outlets, Robbins points out that Phoenix Cruiser also offers factory service, a feature that will definitely save time in the long run. “I have had customers tell me that we can get them in and out in sometimes only a few hours while they wait,” he said. “Whereas if they had to depend on a dealer, they would have to drop off their coach and wait for weeks to get work done.”

The factory-direct sales process places a tremendous amount of importance on the customer, and rightfully so. As consumers, we are accustomed to dealing with high-pressure sales techniques for everything from homes to cars to electronics, so a relatively hands-off sales approach combined with a here-when-you-need-us service attitude is welcome by customers and often leads to positive reviews. “We frequently hear how much [EarthRoamer customers] enjoy the individual attention they receive during the purchase process and the continued customer care beyond the sale,” said Stein.

The advantages of direct customization are not overlooked by buyers. “We have been told we offer the

ultimate buying experience, like buying an Apple product or even a Tesla car,” said the RV Factory’s Shea.

The factory-direct process can go a long way toward building trust between the manufacturer and customer. “[Coach House] customers feel comfortable knowing they will be taken care of if they should experience any problems,” said Garzeny.

The factory-direct process is beneficial for both manufacturer and buyer, for a number of different reasons, but one thing is clear: factory-direct purchasing is a powerful consumer tool, and with continual access to information afforded by the Internet will likely only get bigger and more widespread.

“We’ve been selling factory-direct for more than 55 years, and it has worked very well for our customers and us,” said Sportsmobile’s Meyer.

Still, old buying habits die hard, so factory-direct manufacturers are doing their best to break the mold. “Our largest challenge is the mindset of customers that what they see is what they get,” said Space Craft’s Trautman. “We offer the ability to create a trailer that reflects your needs and lifestyle.”

WHERE TO BUY FACTORY-DIRECT

Coach House	800-235-0984, www.coachhouserv.com
EarthRoamer	303-833-7330, www.earthroamer.com
Escape Trailer	855-703-1650, www.escapetrailer.com
New Horizons	800-235-3140, www.horizonsrv.com
Phoenix Cruiser	877-754-8535, www.phoenixusarv.com
The RV Factory	844-284-6678, www.thervfactory.com
Space Craft	888-463-7520, www.spacecraftmfg.com
Sportsmobile	512-835-4409, www.sportsmobile.com

“Custom-building is the foundation of Space Craft,” said the company’s president, Marsha Trautman. Buyers can choose from a seemingly endless selection of colors, flooring and furniture.



SMALL FAVORS

Keeping holding tanks clean and fresh smelling is easy with these effective products in petite packages

We all love to think about our next RV journey. Discovering new places, meeting friends, making memories that can last a lifetime. The one thing we don't like to think about, however, are holding tanks. We don't want to imagine

what's in them, and we certainly don't relish the thought of emptying them. Unpleasant as they may seem, they are a necessary evil that allows us the freedom to travel anywhere and always have a bathroom along for the journey, which is a great convenience. And, the

fact is, holding tanks really aren't a big deal if you use the proper chemicals and practice the correct dumping and flushing procedures.

Most large travel trailers and fifth-wheels have commensurately sized holding tanks and storage compartments that can easily accommodate your dumping hardware and chemical of choice. But what about smaller trailers and campers? Sometimes exterior storage is at a premium, limiting the size of the sanitation products we can bring along. So, we're presenting some of the most popular holding-tank products — described in each company's own words — that are available in small bottles, packets and the latest development, the drop-in (aka toss-in). Of course, all of these companies offer larger containers for bigger trailers, so make sure to visit their websites to see what is available for your application.

Dumping the holding tanks can be quick, clean and odor-free when you've used the holding-tank product as directed and follow the right procedures.



Camco

TST: Camco TST is available in a variety of sizes and delivery methods to suit every RVer — but for those of us with smaller rigs, TST Orange Power drop-ins fill the bill. The citrus-scented pouches treat up to 40 gallons and control odor for up to seven days, during any season. The product also breaks down waste and tissue, lubricates valves and cleans sensors. Environmentally sensitive RVers will appreciate that TST contains no formaldehyde and is 100 percent biodegradable. Camco also offers TST Tabs, and its Rhino RV Holding Tank Treatment comes in a pack of 4-ounce bottles.

Retail Cost: \$10 to \$12 for a pack of five TST Orange Power drop-ins
Camco Manufacturing, 800-334-2004, www.camco.net



Century Chemical

Travel Jon: Travel Jon Holding Tank Deodorizer/Cleaner has a familiar blue color that is biodegradable and contains no formaldehyde. The highly concentrated formula (only 2 ounces per charge) helps break down waste and tissue, and the detergent component helps keep the holding tank clean. It's available in a three-pack of 8-ounce bottles, making it convenient to keep on board. Meanwhile, the company's Travel Jon Waste Digester is offered in a box of eight 2-ounce packages and can be used in black and gray tanks. Finally, Blue Max drop-in packets are sold in a bag of 10 and offer a powerful effervescent cleaning action in addition to odor-fighting power.

Retail Cost: \$6 to \$8 for a pack of three 8-ounce Travel Jon Holding Tank Deodorizer/Cleaner bottles
Century Chemical, 800-348-3505, www.centurychemical.com



Dometic

D Premium Holding Tank Treatment: Dometic makes a lot of things for RVs, including toilets, so it makes sense that the company offers its own line of holding-tank products that go by the letter D. One of the most popular offerings is D Premium Holding Tank Treatment, available in liquid and dry formulas, as well as a 12-pack of drop-ins. Aside from providing long-lasting, formaldehyde-free odor control, even in hot weather, the product's additives break down waste and help tanks rinse cleaner during pump-out.

Retail Cost: \$11 to \$13 for a pack of 12 drop-ins (either product). **Dometic USA, 800-544-4881, www.dometic.com**



D 3 'N 1 Bowl Cleaner and Tank Treatment: Another handy D-branded product is 3 'N 1 Bowl Cleaner and Tank Treatment, which combines an air freshener, bowl cleaner and tank treatment all in one. The fast-dissolving drop-in packets release effervescent cleaning action along with a fresh lavender scent. Once in the holding tank, the 100 percent biodegradable product breaks down waste and keeps the tank interior clean. It's available in a trial size of one packet or a 12-pack.



Eco-Save

Eco-Save Dry: Eco-Save Dry is a bacteria/enzyme-based product that works in black and gray tanks, and contains no perfume or surfactants — just friendly bacteria that actually enhances the digestion of waste in septic systems. The environmentally safe, non-staining product does not clean the holding tanks, but it does reduce solids and control odor. Plus, it is very economical — an 8-ounce jar treats 25 to 30 tanks (not gallons) of waste.

Retail Cost: \$25 for an 8-ounce jar
Eco-Save
 800-950-9666, www.eco-save.com



Kronen

Kronen Premium Holding Tank Treatment:

Using a potent combination of naturally occurring microorganisms that are specifically engineered to break down organic materials, Kronen reduces the holding-tank contents to liquid and leaves behind a subtle herbal scent. Kronen liquid is available in a six-pack of 4-ounce single-use bottles, as well as handy drop-ins.

Retail Cost: \$12.99 for the six-pack, \$13.99 for a pack of 10 drop-ins
ProPack Packaging, 888-260-1288,
www.kronen1.com



Monochem

T-5: Even if you haven't used Monochem T-5, you've probably already experienced its benefits; this blue-powder toilet chemical has been used to neutralize waste odors in recirculating and portable toilets since the company's inception more than 55 years ago. Moisture-resistant foil packets are simple to use — just pour the premeasured 2.25-ounce contents of one packet into the toilet, and T-5 immediately begins combating odor-causing bacteria.

Retail cost: \$15.95 for a box of six 2-ounce packets
Worldwide Monochem, 512-267-5190,
www.satellite-environmental.com

TankTechs

TankTechs Rx:

Developed by a family-owned business that specializes in the pumping, cleaning and sanitizing of RV and boat black and gray tanks, TankTechs Rx is a liquid tank treatment that uses probiotic organisms to remove odor and break down waste and paper to a liquid that contains antioxidants. TankTechs Rx also controls struvites (mineral crystals that form when sewage breaks down).



Retail Cost: \$15.99 for an 8-ounce bottle (16 tank treatments)
TankTechs Rx, 800-625-7945,
www.tanktechsrx.com

Thetford

Aqua-Kem: Billed as the top-selling holding-tank deodorant of all time, Thetford's Aqua-Kem liquefies waste and breaks down tissue fast to prevent clogs, while powerful detergents clean tank walls and drain lines. Aqua-Kem works around the clock in all weather conditions, and although it contains formaldehyde, it is biodegradable and environmentally safe when disposed of properly. Aqua-Kem is available in a three-pack of 8-ounce bottles or a six-pack of 8-ounce bottles, while Aqua-Kem DRI is available in a box of eight 2-ounce packets.

Retail Cost: \$8 to \$15
Thetford
 800-543-1219, www.thetford.com



Valterra Products

Odorlos:

Recently added to the Valterra family of products, Odorlos uses a sophisticated natural technology developed in Scandinavia to be both effective and good for the environment. When added to holding tanks, Odorlos provides naturally occurring bacteria with a continuous supply of the best alternative energy source to pure oxygen: nitrates. This eliminates the need for bacteria to target sulfate for energy, and the result is no holding tank odor. All it takes is 1 ounce for every 10 gallons to prevent odor and break down waste and tissue. Scent-free, formaldehyde-free and 100 percent biodegradable, Odorlos is available in a nine-pack of 4-ounce bottles, a box of 10 4-ounce dry packets and a 10-pack of quick-dissolving drop-ins.

Retail Cost: \$14.83 to \$22.50





Pure Power Blue: Pure Power Blue is Valterra's chemical-free, bacterial-enzyme holding-tank treatment that performs in all temperature conditions. Its powerful BioBlastPlus technology provides odor control and keeps holding tanks clean with a fresh scent. Pure Power Blue liquefies waste and toilet paper, and just 2 ounces treats 40-gallon black or gray tanks.

Retail Cost: \$1.98 for a 4-ounce bottle of liquid, \$15.17 for eight dry packets, \$15.43 for a pack of 12 Bio-Pouch toss-ins

Valterra Products

818-898-1671, www.valterra.com

Walex Products Company

Bio-Pak and Porta-Pak:

When you're ready to leave on your next trip, just drop a single Bio-Pak into the holding tank and add water. The natural enzyme formula starts working immediately to control odor and break down solids. Packaged in a resealable slide-zipper bag containing 10 drop-ins, the formaldehyde-free formula also cleans sensors and lubricates valves. Porta-Pak offers similar benefits and is available in two fragrances: Original and Lavender Breeze.



Retail Cost: \$10 to \$13 for a pack of 10 Bio-Pak drop-ins, \$9 to \$11 for a pack of 10 Porta-Pak drop-ins

Walex Products Company

800-338-3155, www.walex.com



3X:Chemistry

nuGen: 3X:Chemistry's nuGen is an advanced nanotechnology formula that creates a self-cleaning nano-shield on holding-tank walls, keeping waste in suspension while eliminating odors on contact. The fast-acting all-in-one system cleans the tank and walls, breaks down waste and tissue, lubricates valves and cleans sensors. The formaldehyde-free liquid requires just 2 ounces to treat a 40-gallon tank.

Retail Cost: \$16 to \$20 for a 20-ounce tip-and-pour bottle

3X:Chemistry

866-773-6136, www.3xchemistry.com

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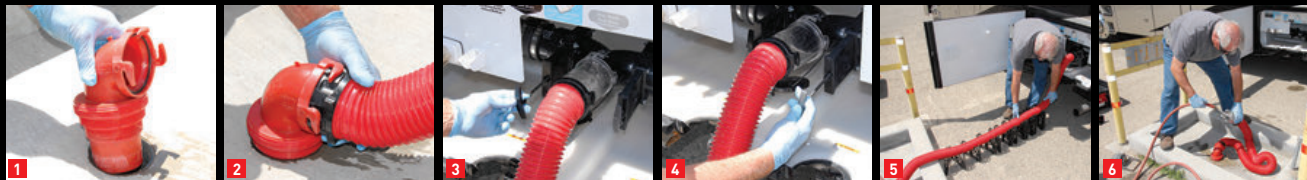
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Dumping Basics

Dumping an RV's holding tanks seems like a pretty simple process — and it is, if you know how to do it properly. The trouble is, many new RVers aren't shown the basics from the beginning, and some learn the hard way that incorrect practices can result in some rather unpleasant surprises. To prevent you from becoming another amusing story around the campfire, here are some helpful tips:

- ✓ Buy a box of disposable gloves and keep them, along with a bottle of hand sanitizer and some paper towels, in the utility bay.
- ✓ When using the toilet, it's tempting to conserve water, but too little can cause buildup in the tank, making it hard to empty.
- ✓ When hooked up to the sewer, it's OK to leave the gray valve open, but not the black. Wait until this tank is around half full, then go outside and pull the handle. Leaving the valve open allows liquids to drain away, leaving solids behind. Make sure the gray tank valve is closed before opening the black valve handle.
- ✓ If you don't have a black-tank flush, keep a five-gallon bucket on hand. After dumping the black tank, open the toilet valve and dump a bucketful of water down — it's a lot more sanitary than dragging the dump station hose through your rig or running it into a window. Repeat the process a couple of times if you have a larger holding tank. It doesn't have to be full — just enough to rinse away leftover stuff at the bottom of the tank.
- ✓ When you're finished, put about a gallon of water in the tank and add some toilet treatment.

HOW TO DO IT



1. Get yourself a good hose with a 90-degree threaded fitting like this one from Valterra. It will work with a variety of sewer ports, and even if the one you're using isn't threaded, having this fitting will prevent the hose from coming out when you dump and keep odor to a minimum.

2. It doesn't really matter which end of the sewer hose you connect first. For our purposes, we started at the sewer port. Before connecting the hose, make sure the fitting on the end is properly attached, then turn it clockwise into the elbow until the slotted pegs on the hose fitting are completely in contact with the barbs on the elbow. As you can see here, the hose is not completely locked into the fitting yet.

3. Remove the sewer cap from the RV and attach the other end of the hose. You'll note that we use a clear fitting, which may sound gross, but it allows you to see when the tank is rinsed completely clean, as it is here. Once empty, close the black-tank valve and either dump the bucket[s] of water down the toilet or attach the dump station hose to the black-tank flush port and turn it on. Most manufacturers recommend

leaving the black-tank valve open during flushing to prevent the tank from getting full and possibly rupturing. However, as long as you stay with the rig while running the water, it's OK to close the black-tank valve and open it after a minute or so (depending on the size of the holding tank, of course). Repeat this step two or three times.

4. Close the black-tank valve, then open the gray-tank valve. Since gray water is primarily soapy water from the sinks and shower, it helps to further clean the inside of the sewer hose.

5. Some dump stations may have a curb around the sewer port, which can make dumping a challenge. Keep a sewer hose support like this one in a storage compartment.

6. When you're done, wash the sewer hose thoroughly, and don't put the water hose inside — that's not cool. Hold the sewer hose up straight after rinsing to make sure it has no more liquid in it, then pull it from the port and thoroughly rinse the dump station with water so it is clean and ready for the next person. 🚚

NEW!

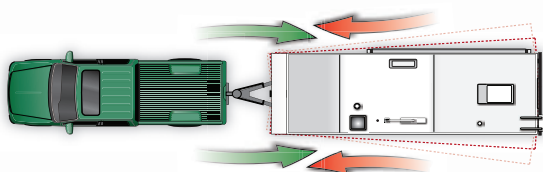


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GO WITH THE FLOW



A trio of kits from BD Diesel Performance keep the fuel at optimum pressure and protect injectors for maximum gains when adding power-enhancement products

As much as I don't want to be that person who loudly states the obvious, in the case of towing, the pickup is the true workhorse. Individual expression of vehicle personalization, whether bolting on accessories for aesthetics or modifying an engine to add performance and power, is virtually universal among truck owners. The current crop of truck engineers from auto manufacturers is providing diesel platforms that offer very stout out-of-the-box, asphalt-tearing performance levels, and there are a number aftermarket products that add eye-popping horsepower and torque. But "bolting on" performance does not come without a few

mechanical setbacks, such as premature fuel filter clogging and fuel-injector failure. Most diesel fuel injectors are made up of several complex internal moving parts operating under a great amount of pressure (typically more than 25,000 psi). Unfortunately, what many performance companies don't mention is that, while the stock injectors can handle most of the extra fuel being shoved through them, a common weak point is the maximum volume of fuel being delivered by the stock pump system, which can't keep up with the gains. The same is true for the factory filtration system; it simply can't keep pace with monster amounts of additional fuel being pushed through.

Owners adding power improvers can look to BD Diesel Performance for a trio of cost-effective products that will make sure the engine never runs low on fuel volume. The company's Flow-MaX Fuel Lift Pump Kit, Fuel Filter Kit and the Low Fuel Pressure Alarm Kit are products that allow owners to realize the optimum benefit from diesel-engine performance equipment without compromising relative componentry.

The heart of the system is the conversion to an external, frame-mounted BD Flow-MaX V3 Lift Pump. BD's Flow-MaX Fuel Filter Kit is highly recommended for use with this new pump, especially when considering it's almost triple the size of the stocker. Topping off the new pump and filtration

improvements is BD's Low Fuel Pressure Alarm Light, which provides yet another level of insurance for those who like to monitor real-time function. While these three products work best as a team, they are only offered à la carte.

We installed these kits in a 2006 Ram, and quickly discovered that a little pre-planning will go a long way, especially in key areas like determining fuel hose length and the number of clamps needed, in case a slightly custom assembly becomes necessary. Also, this project is technically doable by advanced do-it-yourselfers, but the use of a vehicle lift will eliminate a lot of struggles when removing the fuel tank that otherwise would be encountered while crawling around on the ground.

BD supplies all the necessary hardware, brackets, wiring terminals, filters and pressure switch for all three kits, but it's a very good idea to double

check the presence of all the parts. The parts for all the kits are crafted using high-quality materials and precise machining. Plan on devoting at least a full day to the project just in case there's a small setback. It will also be in your best interest to solicit a capable friend's help. Another key point is to begin the project with an almost empty fuel tank; even a quarter full tank will still be very heavy. We found that the tank was manageable at 1/8 full.

After battery disconnection, the installation begins by removing the banjo bolt on the factory fuel filter housing, facing the rear of the truck. With the factory fuel supply line banjo fitting removed, the Flow-MaX metric-thread to JIC and JIC to barbed adapters can be secured in their specified places. This is also the time to connect the length of 3/8-inch fuel hose to the new barbed fitting using one of the hose



PRESSURIZED PERFORMANCE

BD's Flow-MaX V3 Lift Pump and Fuel Filter kits are packaged with all the hardware and small parts for installation by seasoned do-it-yourselfers.



(1) Locate the original fuel filter, which is flanked by the brake master cylinder and air filter horn. (2) Original banjo bolts are on the backside of the factory fuel filter. (3) Rubber hose and new adapter fitting are connected to the fuel filter and secured with a hose clamp. (4) Instructions call for mounting the fuel pump and filter kit on the inside of the frame, but we ran into clearance problems here and elected to mount the pump on the outside of the frame (5) with the provided stainless-steel straps. (6) When using the filter kit with the BD pump, the screens are removed from the barb fitting that go into the inlet and outlet in the filter housing.

clamps, followed by loosely running the remaining hose down to the underside of the truck and along the driver-side frame rail to a location suitable for the new pump and filters.

There are two options for mounting the pump. One is a little more involved and permanent requiring drilling, and the other slightly quicker to install and uninstall, if ever necessary, by way of tough stainless-steel straps. It's highly recommended that a loose pre-assembly take place in order to pinpoint where the parts will fit best for the specific truck. In our case, the entire set-up had to be placed on the outside of the frame rail, versus the intended inside location, because of clearance problems between the fuel tank and 4WD transfer case. On the plus side, this means quicker and easier filter access, on the down side, it means less enclosed protection. We plan

on adding a custom cover fabricated with a steel frame and aluminum panels.

Once the pump is securely mounted, the Flow-MaX Fuel Filter Kit can be assembled and connected after prefilling the filters and lubricating the seals. From here, the fuel feed hose can be routed after tapping into the truck's steel factory fuel line. Keep in mind, this hard line is the largest in diameter of all the neighboring lines as well as the thickest. It's going to be a bit of a

struggle to get through this line, so you'll need a quality compact tubing cutter and a place to get comfortable; it will likely take a while to make the cut. After cutting the hard fuel line, finish routing the $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch hose (installed at the outset of this job) from the OEM filter housing to the outlet barb on the new pump/filter assembly. Another small section of rubber fuel hose will go between the freshly cut hard line and the inlet barb on the new fuel hardware.



(7) Loctite gel is applied to the adapter that screws into the filter head before tightening. (8) It's important to coat the gaskets on the fuel filters so they will seal against the housings. (9) Filter fittings on the pump only use O-rings for proper sealing. (10) The pump is mounted to the frame and filter housings are attached to the pump. This is the complete assembly minus the filters.

Now the harder part: routing the final hose, which is housed deep inside the fuel tank. You guessed it; the fuel tank must be dropped and the one-piece factory fuel pump and sending unit basket removed. This is the part where a vehicle lift will be your best friend, allowing easier access to the two nuts and straps holding the tank into position. A little tip: It may be easier to remove the left rear tire to access the electrical plug and fuel line clips through the side of the bed and frame.

Once the tedious task of removing the tank is completed and the basket on a bench, you'll need to carefully remove the OEM pump, which is held in place by three black plastic arms that must be broken or cut through. The instructions tell you to use a hacksaw blade to cut through the arms, however that can be quite messy and demand cleaning, which relates to more work and time. We simply opted to carefully use a pair of side cutters. With the original pump out of the way and the prep work complete, a few inches of hose is put into place. Before this step can be completed, the end of the hose resting at the bottom of the pump basket **MUST** be properly prepared. Following the directions, either a V-notch or angle cut must be carved into the hose, thereby preventing suctioning to the basket. It is absolutely imperative to pay close attention to detail here as your truck can and will run itself out of fuel, and, trust me, you don't want to remove the tank twice. With all the inner tank modifications to the fuel feed hose completed, the tank is ready to go back



(11) After cutting the truck's fuel feed line, the rubber hose is connected and double clamped. This hose is routed to the inlet on the filter housing. **(12)** The fuel tank was dropped from the truck frame for access to the factory fuel basket/pump assembly. **(13)** The line to the original pump is lightly scored and cut at this point before removing the rest of the pump assembly. **(14)** The end of the fuel feed line must be cut precisely to prevent collapsing and the possibility of running out of fuel.

in the same way it came out.

The only remaining install step to conquer at this point is some very simple and fairly quick wiring. However, just before the final wiring is handled, we elected to add the aforementioned Low Fuel Pressure Alarm Light into the mix, tying all wiring together at once. This is not a very difficult job, requiring a few minutes to replace the banjo bolt on the top portion of the CP3 rail injection pump with the pressure switch and supplied two sealing washers. There's only one pump trigger wire to be spliced into from beneath the engine's Total Integrated Power Module (TIPM)

and the power and ground go through a prewired relay and then directly to the battery. The ¼-inch light is routed to a spot on or under the dash and the single, switched 12-volt DC source is connected via a fuse tap. Wiring complete, job complete!

As an engine performance geek, it's nice to have a seat-of-the-pants feeling that something is happening after installing new power-adding components. But it's different here. If you're seeking tons of on-the-fly power from these upgrades, you'll be disappointed. The Flow-MaX Fuel Lift Pump and Fuel Filter kits aren't going to deliver any noticeable power to a stock vehicle. Instead you'll get enough clean, fuel-flow volume from the tank to easily handle any power increases gained by aftermarket upgrades while providing extra protection for costly injectors. Considering most diesel fuel injectors average more than \$400 each, I'd call that cheap insurance. The BD Flow-MaX Fuel Lift Pump kit sells for \$566; the Fuel Filter kit is \$172 and the Low Fuel Pressure Alarm is \$74. 🚚

(15) The original filter on left is compared against the BD filters, one of which is a water separator. A new filter (from parts store) was installed in the factory housing at the same time. **(16)** A pressure switch is mounted to the CP3 rail injection pump using new adaptor and sealing washers.



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UP ON THE ROOF

Spending a little time where the sun does shine will prevent bigger problems later on

You know it's up there — a silent sentinel that protects you and your family. It speaks to you on rainy days and can roar in a hailstorm. It's your RV's roof, and as long as it keeps the inclement weather out, you probably don't think about it much. But just like the rest of your RV, the roof requires regular maintenance to make sure it works as intended and lasts for many family vacations to come. The ravages of the sun, combined with dirt, acid rain, bird droppings and other natural enemies will eventually cause sealants, even the roof itself, to fade, harden and crack over time.

The good news is, there are a lot of things you can do to protect it, maintain it and even repair it yourself. A good rule of thumb is to get up on the roof before and after every travel season, and give it a thorough cleaning, followed by a conditioner/protectant. Inspect the sealant around every roof vent, skylight, antenna, etc., and pay special attention to where the roof material meets the front and rear caps. Any sealant that is cracking or lifting needs to be carefully scraped off and replaced.

Now the prospect of scraping and sealing all these areas on your trailer's roof may seem daunting, but just remember: you don't have to do it all at once, on the same day, or even in the same week. Scrape and seal one roof vent, then work your way to the others. Before long, the

roof will be clean, leak-free and ready for another season.

To get some tips on how its done, we talked to two experts who know a thing or two about RV roofs: Joey Lux of D-Lux Detailing, who specializes in RVs, and C&S RV Service Center, both of Ventura, California. Joey demonstrated the correct way to quickly and easily clean an RV's roof, while the guys at C&S gave us expert tips on how to reseal problem areas. Most of the issues related to RV roofs are associated with the common EPDM rubber material, but TPO and fiberglass roofs require similar care.

For this article, we concentrated mainly on roof vents, but other components on the roof can be repaired in kind. Just remember to take your time and be patient, and leave no edge or screw head uncovered. Your roof will thank you.



If the roof has accumulated a lot of leaves, pine needles or other debris, the first step would be to sweep it. In most cases, however, you can get right to hosing it off. A pressure washer with a fan-spray nozzle definitely works best, and you can get these at most home-improvement stores at a reasonable cost. Failing that, a spray nozzle on a garden hose will work; you'll just have to do extra scrubbing later to get the dirt out.



1) Keep the tip of the pressure washer a good 8 to 10 inches from the surface, passing it back and forth constantly. You can easily see how quickly and effectively it will remove ground-in dirt, but it can also damage the roof or seals if you place the nozzle too close to the surface or concentrate it in one area for too long. **2)** Once done spraying an area, use the rubber roof cleaner of your choice and start scrubbing.



3) Before and after. What a difference!

4) You could use a mop to apply rubber roof protectant, but Joey says this wastes a lot of product. Instead, he recommends using this smaller head, designed for washing windows. It spreads the protectant evenly and leaves the product where it belongs — on the roof.



5) The sealant on the roof of this RV was long overdue for replacement. When scraping off old sealant, push the putty knife in and lift carefully. Don't try to scrape in the same direction as the putty in an effort to remove the putty more quickly — it's easier to snag the roof that way. When in doubt, use a plastic scraper.

6) Work the blade carefully along the mounting flange until the edge touches a screw head, then rotate the blade around it and lift. It may also be easier for you to open the roof vent during this step.

7) Here is the vent with the sealant completely removed from both the rubber roof and the mounting flange. Wipe the area down thoroughly with mineral spirits, and you're ready to start resealing.

8, 9) Use Dicor Self-Leveling Lap Sealant in a caulking gun. First, apply a nice bead where the mounting flange meets the roof, then come back and apply a second bead on top of the flange, making a loop around each screw head. It is not necessary to smooth the bead with a putty knife; the self-leveling action of the product will produce a smooth, uniform bead after only a few minutes.

10) The vent is now properly sealed and will remain leak-proof for many years to come.

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11) EternaBond tape is another great solution for repairing damaged or problem areas. The roof on this particular trailer had numerous soft spots, so, although the membrane was still in good condition, there was another problem: The flexing roof caused the aged sealant to separate, creating the potential for leaks. Instead of lap sealant, the decision was made to fix the problem permanently with EternaBond.

12) Measure and cut the first piece of EternaBond tape, placing it over the mounting flange and butting it up against the vent. Leave enough extra tape on either side of the vent so the pieces placed on the sides will overlap the front and rear.

13, 14) Here's a great installation tip: Peel off a small section of backing first and push the end into place. Then, as you lay the tape down, pull the backing away as you go. This way, you can still lift and reposition the tape if necessary. Once EternaBond is down, it is almost impossible to remove in one piece, so this technique can save a lot of trouble.



15) Here, the EternaBond tape has been applied to all sides, but we're not done yet.

16) All gaps are then sealed with lap sealer for extra insurance.

17) EternaBond is great stuff, but it comes in a big roll, and it's not cheap: a 4-inch by 55-foot roll costs more than \$50. For small gouges, cuts or tears in a rubber roof, consider an RV roof repair kit like this one from Quick Roof. 🚚

SOURCES

C&S RV Service Center: 805-983-1673, www.candsrv.com | D-Lux Detailing: 805-795-3589, www.dluxdetailing.com



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Now it's possible to give the 2014 Toyota Tacoma and Tundra more bite, thanks to Bully Dog's firmware update to its popular GT Platinum Gas tuner (part number 40417). The GT Platinum gas tuner offers increases in power, fuel economy and overall performance while offering a host of monitoring capabilities, according to the company. Toyota owners can now view and monitor more functions than ever, and with the handy diagnostic tools, even make sure the truck is running at its peak. Bully Dog reports horsepower gains of up to 13 horsepower and 22 lb-ft of torque on the 2014 Toyota Tacoma with the 4.0-liter V-6 engine. The GT Platinum Gas tuner works on 2005 to 2014 Tacomas with the 4.0-liter V-6 engine, and 2007 to 2014 Tundras with the 5.7-liter V-8.

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Unlike your home, you don't always know the quality of the power — or its consistency — when hooked up to campground services. To help keep tabs, Hughes Autoformers has introduced its Digital AC Voltage Meter (part number DVM1221). By simply plugging the Digital AC Voltage Meter into any AC outlet, the readout will display AC voltage ranging between 90 and 132. You will know instantly if your RV is receiving the optimal voltage range or if you need to be concerned that the electronics are in danger. The Digital AC Voltage Meter can stay plugged in during your entire stay, offering a gentle night-light as well as constant metering. The easy-to-install meter provides peace of mind that the RV's electrical system is being properly powered.

MSRP: \$14.99

888-540-1504

www.hughesautoformers.com

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Spotlessly Clean

Keeping an RV clean not only makes it look good, it helps the finish last longer. But depending on where you live, hard-water deposits can leave spots on the paint or gelcoat and windows that can be very difficult to remove. Now, you can prevent them from forming in the first place with a deionization water-filtration system by CR Spotless Water Systems. Water spots are mineral deposits — salts that separate into positively and negatively charged ions. Deionization can reduce the amounts of these ions to very low levels through the process of ion exchange. The end result is purified water and no more spots, according to the company. Various systems are available, and the company sells replacement resin (the filtering element).

MSRP: Starting at \$299

866-350-9993, www.crsptless.com

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Super Brute Strength

Got a heavy trailer? The new Super Brute HSB5000R from Husky Towing Products is the company's most powerful A-frame jack, with 5,000 pounds of capacity. Featuring a completely redesigned exterior housing, a screw jack design and the convenience of remote-control operation, this new jack offers the additional benefits of bright LED lights and a trailer power cord storage bracket. At maximum capacity, the Super Brute is said to be able to lift up to 18 inches at a rate of 6 inches per minute. Once it reaches full travel (either up or down), Smart Stop technology cuts power to the motor to avoid a hard stop. The Super Brute HSB5000R comes with 6 feet of 10-gauge power-supply wire, a 30-amp resettable circuit breaker, mounting hardware and two remote-control key fobs.

MSRP: Around \$300, 877-544-4449, www.huskytow.com

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SUPER COUPON

FREE

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LOT 69052 shown
69111/62522/62573

\$6.99
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SUPER COUPON

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69505/62418

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REG. PRICE \$17.99

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WOW SUPER COUPON

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95275 shown

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REG. PRICE \$89.99

SAVE 55%

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SUPER COUPON

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69925/62753
69626/62517

\$9.99

REG. PRICE \$29.99

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47902 shown

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SUPER COUPON

SUPER-WIDE TRI-FOLD ALUMINUM LOADING RAMP HaulMaster

LOT 90018 shown
69595/60334

• 1500 lb. Capacity

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WOW SUPER COUPON

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SUPER COUPON

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66383 shown

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Auxiliary Fuel Tanks

Does it seem like you're stopping too frequently to refuel? Original equipment fuel tanks are a compromise between available space, cost, weight and expected range. Unfortunately, towing uses more fuel, and most vehicles have a fairly short range when hauling a heavy trailer with the stock tank. Fortunately, in many cases, there's something you can do about it, as the aftermarket industry has stepped up

with a large variety of products to help fill the need (so to speak) for more fuel capacity.

Beyond increasing the distance between pit stops, having greater capacity allows you to be more selective about where you purchase fuel, giving you the advantage of shopping around for better pricing, which can vary widely depending on location. This can provide considerable cost savings over time, which can help offset the cost of larger fuel tanks.

Diesel Versus Gasoline

Gasoline is more volatile than diesel fuel and releases more fumes containing harmful chemicals. Therefore, government regulations are stricter on gasoline tanks and require special venting and vapor-recovery systems. In fact, most late-model vehicles since 1996 have a test function in the onboard diagnostics system (OBDII) that pressurizes the fuel tank slightly to determine if the tank is closed off to the ambient air. An air leak or loose fuel filler cap can set off a Check Engine light and store a trouble code.

The complication and expense of regulations for gas tanks has limited the number of companies that offer products for gasoline applications. Diesels, on the other hand, are less

regulated, and both auxiliary and larger replacement tanks are widely available for them.

Types

Auxiliary and replacement fuel tanks come in many different types, shapes and sizes. It's important when shopping for tanks to have an idea of how much additional fuel capacity you want and, of course, where you want to place the tank.

The advantage of a larger replacement tank is that it allows the fuel filler location and fuel gauge to be unchanged, and usually no additional plumbing is needed, making them perhaps the most desirable solution. On the other hand, many fuel tanks designed to fit in the pickup bed come with additional compartments to store items, and others have complete toolboxes. This allows owners to maximize space, as these tanks fit ahead of the fifth-wheel hitch in pickup beds.

Some large SUVs and other utility vehicles can also be retrofitted with larger tanks. Check for optional larger original equipment fuel tanks, which may be ordered through the dealer or even obtained from salvage yards. Various larger aftermarket replacement tanks are also available. In many cases, an Internet search will bring up a slew of choices if you type in the vehicle make and model along with the words "auxiliary or large fuel tank."



This interesting solution from Titan features a locking diamond-plate toolbox atop a corrosion-proof, heavy-duty cross-linked polyethylene fuel tank.

Fuel Gauges

If using an auxiliary tank (in addition to the stock tank) it is important to know the fuel level in each tank. To do this, separate fuel gauges can monitor each tank or you can use the one stock gauge and have a way to connect it to each tank. This would require that the fuel tank sending unit (the electric/float assembly that goes into the tank and measures the level) is compatible with the in-dash gauge. Various sending units have different electrical resistances through their ranges, so make sure to check with the seller about compatibility.

On vehicles with onboard trip computers, when larger tanks are installed, most of the functions will still work except the miles-to-empty feature. It will read as though you have the stock tank still installed.

Most modern vehicles have in-tank fuel pumps. If a larger replacement tank is added, the stock pump may be able to be transferred into the new tank. If an additional auxiliary tank is added, it will need to have its own in-tank electric fuel pump (unless it is designed to use gravity to transfer fuel to the main tank).

Make sure to discuss fuel transfer with the manufacturer or dealer before purchasing a tank. Some drivers choose to move fuel from the auxiliary tank,



Cross-bed auxiliary fuel tanks like this unit from Transfer Flow increase fuel capacity and range, and certain models can also store tools and camping items.

such as an in-bed tank, to the main or original tank, which then routes fuel through the filter and to the engine.

Switchover Valves

Whenever you have two or more tanks, you need a way to select which one is feeding fuel to the engine. These devices are known as fuel-selector or switchover valves. These are typically operated by an electrical solenoid using a remote switch in the cab. You should also have a way to select which fuel-tank sending unit is connected to the gauge; this is typically handled by the same valve assembly. (Fuel return from the engine must also be routed to the same tank the fuel came from, to avoid overflowing an almost-full tank.) Make sure you have these items when purchasing an auxiliary tank.

Transfer Flow, a leading provider of aftermarket fuel tanks, offers the Trax-II and new Trax-III systems, which balance fuel flow between tanks. A computer regularly determines the fuel levels of the main and auxiliary tanks, and the status of the vehicle's fuel system, and transfers fuel to the main tank based on this.

The Trax-III system will transfer fuel at predetermined fuel levels while the vehicle is in operation. The fuel capacity in the main and auxiliary tanks will decrease at similar rates. The LCD display will show the fuel level percentages in each tank and the operational status of the fuel system. When the fuel system is transferring fuel, the message "Pump On" is displayed on the dash-mounted LCD. When the system is not transferring fuel, the message, "Sys OK" is displayed.

Filler Necks

Fuel-tank caps and venting are important because of heat-related vapor pressure and leakage from sloshing. Pressure increases caused by heat could force fuel out when the cap is released. On the other hand, if the fuel and air over it cools, it could create a partial vacuum, which could collapse the tank. Typically, a check valve connected to the fuel tank works in conjunction with a small hole in the tank

cap to let air in as needed and release excess pressure as it accumulates.

It's important to know where the auxiliary tank filler neck will be located and which side it will be on. It can be a real nuisance to have filler necks on both sides of a vehicle. You may either have to turn the vehicle around to switch sides during fill-ups or perhaps pass the hose over the vehicle to reach the other side. Many times, the hoses are too short and won't reach both sides of a large vehicle.

Mounting

Pickup trucks have several locations where underside mounted tanks can be readily installed. Many trucks have tanks mounted along the frame rails. Most modern trucks have one tank installed along the frame rails amidships. Some models have also had tanks mounted under the rear of the bed, although most modern trucks have spare tires there. If you are willing to move the spare tire into the bed, it may be possible, depending on truck model and year, to have an additional tank fitted underneath where the spare was located. (See Kevin Livingston's article about installing the Titan Spare Tire Auxiliary Fuel System, "Feed the Beast," in the February 2015 *Trailer Life*.)

Because fuel in tanks can slosh with great force while vehicles are in motion, care needs to be taken to reduce this sloshing and make the tank more stable. When purchasing a tank, make sure it has internal baffles to slow the rate with which the fuel can move around. The larger the tank, the more important this becomes, especially with wide, cross-bed models.

Most under-vehicle tanks are held in place by metal straps. Ensure that these and all mounting hardware come with the kit. Also, make sure that the kit comes with all the items needed for a complete installation, including venting, filler necks, sending units, pumps, hoses, caps, etc.

Materials

Fuel tanks are available in various high-tech plastics, plain steel, stainless steel, aluminum and aluminized

steel. Modern gasoline tends to be quite corrosive when left in tanks for extended periods, and gasoline tanks must be certified for the fuel usage and designed to resist corrosion.

Among the manufacturers mentioned in our Sources list, Titan makes tanks out of polymer, Transfer flow uses aluminized steel, and KSH uses stainless steel or aluminum. Dee Zee uses aluminum or plain steel, but the company makes tanks only for diesel fuel, which is less corrosive.

Weight Considerations

Fuel tanks and fuel can be quite heavy, and this must be taken into consideration before purchasing any tank. A gallon of gasoline weighs 6.2 pounds (approximately 750 grams), while a gallon of diesel fuel weighs 7.5 pounds (about 850 grams). Fuel density varies considerably, so these numbers are approximate.

Multiply the maximum tank capacity by the unit weight of the respective fuel, and add this amount to the empty weight of the tank to determine total weight. Take into consideration where the tank will be located and what effect that will have on axle loading. Make sure your tow vehicle has sufficient remaining payload capacity by weighing each axle on a truck scale. Then subtract the axle's scale weight from the gross axle weight rating (GAWR), typically posted on the driver's doorjamb and in the owner's manual. The remaining capacity should exceed the calculated weight of the extra tank.

With a larger or auxiliary fuel tank, you can enjoy more freedom on the road — and that's what the RV lifestyle is all about. 🚐

Sources

Dee Zee

800-779-2102, www.deeze.com

KSH Fuel Products

928-680-6610, www.kshmarine.com

Titan Fuel Tanks

800-728-4982, www.titanfueltanks.com

Transfer Flow

800-442-0056, www.transferflow.com

Quixx Fixes

Products designed to take much of the effort out of repairing paint scratches, polishing metal and restoring headlight lenses

DIFFICULTY	1 2 3 4 5
TIME TO COMPLETE	VARIES
TOOLS NEEDED	DRILL MOTOR, MASKING TAPE

Rovers are pretty good at keeping their vehicles clean. After all, a well-maintained exterior is important if you want to protect your investment. But in our quest for overall cleanliness, the small details often get overlooked. Minor paint scratches, fogged headlight lenses and oxidized metal (especially on wheels) seem to get put on the back burner, mainly because they're tedious and time-consuming. But Quixx, a company out of Germany, wants you to keep exterior detailing at the top of your mind and offers repair systems for these jobs that make it easier for you to sweat the small stuff.



The headlight lens on the left is in bad shape, limiting output at night to dangerous levels. After treating with the Headlight Restoration kit, the lens on the right is much clearer. This process is not overly tiring, but it does take a firm motion to polish out the faded lenses.

Paint scratches are maddening but hard to avoid. The Paint Repair Pen, essentially a paint marker filled with clearcoat, is designed to fill in minor scratches. To use, the surface is washed and dried, and the pen simply run across the scratched area after some vigorous shaking. For deeper scratches, the process is a bit more involved and requires the company's High Performance Paint Scratch Remover kit, which contains tubes of repair and finish paste, four strips of ultrafine-grit sandpaper and a couple of polishing cloths.

The Paint Scratch Remover relies on a handful of steps to fix scratches. Just as before, you'll need to have a clean surface. Depending on actual depth, the scratch is first filled in with base-color touch-up paint, available at auto-parts stores, or clearcoat from the Paint Repair Pen. After allowing the treated scratch to sit for about a week, the remaining steps can be completed. Carefully following the instructions, the process begins with gentle wet sanding,

followed by the application of Quixx Repair No. 1 and Quixx Finish No. 2, and subsequent polishing as directed.

Metal polishing can be handled by one or two specialized Quixx products, depending on the condition of the surface. The company's All Metal Polish is available in an individual tube or as part of the Intense system, which includes a drill-mounted Energy Cone and a 13 x 13-inch microfiber towel. If the metal has been coated with chrome or some other type of plating, then the All Metal Polish, some clean soft cloths and a little elbow grease are all that's necessary. The drill-powered Energy Cone in the Intense kit can burn through plated metals if it isn't used by experienced hands, so it should be reserved for use on solid metals like aluminum or magnesium wheels, or perhaps brass trim and various hardware.

With the extensive use of polycar-

Everything needed to polish and restore finishes is provided in kits offered by Quixx.



« **EXTERIOR RESTORATION** Quixx markets systems to repair scratched paint, bring back luster to dull metal surfaces and restore headlight lens clarity.



bonate headlight lenses these days, the Quixx Headlight Restoration kit really comes in handy, especially when considering the high replacement costs of the lenses. The restoration kit is designed to clear yellowed, foggy and faded plastic lenses that are not cracked or otherwise damaged. Inside the Headlight Restoration kit is a tube of Lens Polish, a bottle of Lens Sealer, a small foam polishing block, some strips of 2,000- to 5,000-grit sandpaper and

four 8 x 11-inch polishing cloths.

The process is simple and not that hard on your muscles. Clean the lenses first, then take one of the polishing cloths and foam block and apply the polish to the lens using a firm and fast motion, continuing until the lens is clear. After removing any residue using a wet cloth, the sealer can be sprayed on the lens and spread evenly with one of the polishing cloths. Wait five to 10 minutes for a haze to appear, after

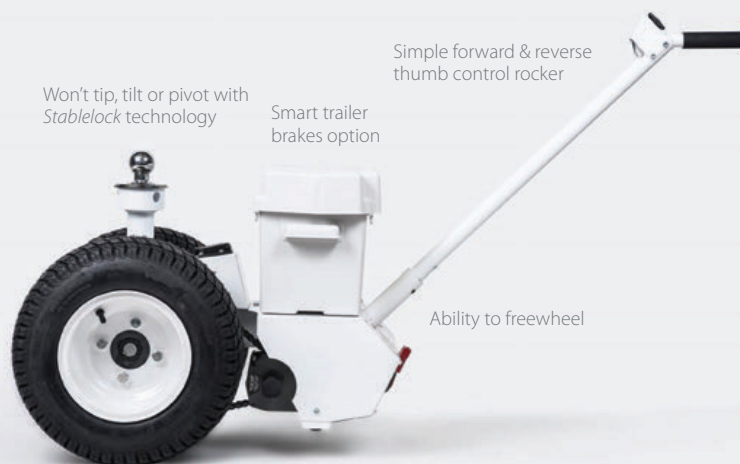


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which the lens can be gently polished using another clean cloth. At this point, if there's still visible marring on the lens, additional steps using the provided sandpaper must be taken.

The headlights used for this test were impaired by a significant layer of yellowing on the lenses, limiting light output almost to the point where night driving was getting dangerous. After the Quixx treatment, both headlights were essentially like new again but at a fraction of the cost of new lenses. The projected light coming from the restored headlights nearly doubled in distance and brightness.

The same level of success can also be expected from All Metal Polish in either individual or kit form. The test zones — slightly dulled aluminum and a small section of chrome — showed huge improvements and appeared to have a much deeper, richer shine, once processed with the Quixx system. As far as the paint repair goes, there will be slight differences in results depending on paint types and the nature of the scratch; a little experimentation is needed here.

The biggest investment you'll make in these Quixx products is elbow grease, as the products themselves are very affordable. The Quixx Paint Pen retails for \$12.99, the High Performance Paint Scratch Remover kit is \$17.99, the All Metal Polish and Intense All Metal Polish kits are \$7.99 and \$21.99 respectively, and the Headlight Restoration kit can be purchased for \$19.99. Quixx products are available online and at auto-parts stores. 🚚

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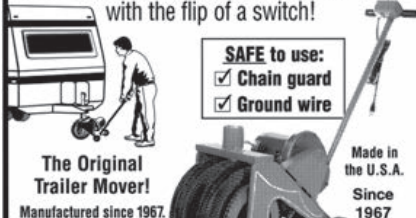
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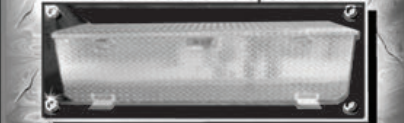


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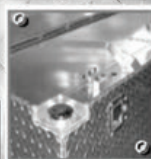
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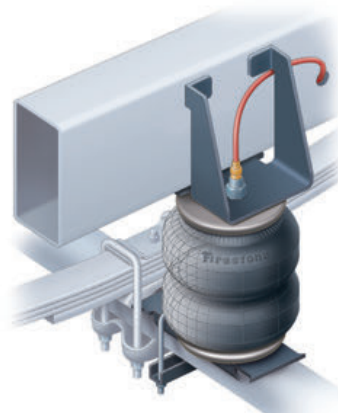
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TRUCK PAYLOAD CAPACITY

Q I have a 2015 Ram 2500 4WD with the Cummins diesel and shortbed configuration. The maximum payload is listed at 2,360 pounds. I purchased a 2015 Montana High Country fiver with a loaded weight of about 13,000 pounds and a hitch weight of 2,075 pounds. I believe this leaves me with 290 pounds of payload capacity for my wife, cocker spaniels and other things carried in the truck. Am I interpreting the capabilities of the truck correctly? Do I have options? Are the posted hitch weights in brochures with the unit dry or loaded?

Jim Georger, Lyndonville, New York

A The truck's payload capacity is based on its gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) minus its wet curb weight, which most truck manufacturers consider including a full tank of fuel and driver but no other passengers or cargo. The best way to know these figures for sure is to visit a certified scale and weigh the truck, then compare that figure to its GVWR.

There are exceptions, but most manufacturer brochures state dry, empty weights — but, of course, no one ever tows a dry, empty trailer except home from the



dealership. You say that the trailer has a loaded weight of "about" 13,000 pounds and a hitch weight of 2,075 pounds, so I'm not sure if you've actually weighed the trailer or you're making an educated guess. If you haven't actually weighed it, again, a truck scale is your friend.

The next time you're loaded for a trip, tow the trailer to a scale and weigh it, noting the pickup's front and rear axle weights and the trailer's axle weight. This will also give you the overall combination weight. Now drop the trailer and drive the truck back on the same scale, again noting the truck's front and rear axle weights. Deduct the solo truck weights from the towing weights, which gives you the trailer hitch weight on the truck, and you can see exactly where you stand on how much payload capacity you have left for your truck. You can also add that hitch weight to the trailer's axle weight to determine its true weight in loaded and ready-to-use condition.

— **Jeff Johnston**

TV-ATTACHMENT BOLTS

Q I just bought a new 16-foot Coleman light travel trailer from the Rossford, Ohio, Camping World. I asked what length the bolts should be to hang the TV bracket and could not get an answer, so I called Dutchmen, the company that builds the Coleman trailer, and they told me to call the dealer for the information. I contacted two different Camping World dealerships, and as of now I haven't got the answer.

There is a large sticker on the back wall locating where the TV bracket is to be placed. Even the owner's manual doesn't mention anything about hanging the TV bracket. I just don't want the bolts to go through the back wall

to the outside.

Stephen Rentz, Whitehouse, Ohio

A A new trailer purchase usually includes a reasonable level of dealer accommodation, Stephen, so it's surprising you didn't have better luck with this. That TV-ready mounting location is established by the factory, and the dealer should know what to do with it.

It may have helped to ask the Camping World (CW) guys, "When you install a TV bracket as an aftermarket accessory, what size screws do you use?" If CW sold you the TV bracket, that means it also installs it as an accessory item, so the service people should know the installation details.

If the bracket was included with the trailer as a factory-supplied item that the owner is expected to install, then there should be instructions with the bracket, or the selling dealer should have that information.

As far as information from Coleman is concerned, as a last resort you'd have to ask its technical service department how thick the studs are in the trailer's back wall. If, for example, the wall has 2x2 studs, nominally 1½ inches square, you could choose screws or lag bolts 1¼ inches long, considering some of the screw length is taken up by the thickness of the bracket material and perhaps a washer. You could also measure the wall thickness adjacent to a back wall storage compartment or utility opening. Good luck with your search! — **J.J.**

THE TECH TEAM



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



JEFF JOHNSTON: Jeff served as technical director of *Trailer Life* for 20 years and has been an RV enthusiast, mechanic and writer since he could hold a wrench.

HUMID TRAILER STORAGE

Q We are Minnesota snowbirds and travel to Florida for the winter. We

are considering leaving our trailer in Florida for the high-humidity summer. It's a 27-footer by Forest River. What can we do to prevent any high-humidity moisture damage to our trailer if left unoccupied for eight months? I know condo owners leave their air conditioner on while they are away, but that is not an option for us.

Douglas Wenzel, West Concord, Minnesota

A You didn't say specifically if you have power available, but it seems like you don't in your storage facility. The best way to avoid humidity damage is with a dehumidifier set up with a drain outside the trailer. Without that option, start with a good quality RV cover that will help keep the rain off the vehicle and help prevent the sun's UV rays from damaging its finish. The cover also allows you to leave a few windows and roof vents cracked open a bit to allow some air circulation. While you can't avoid the presence of the humidity without the dehumidifier in operation, at least you can avoid the effects of hot, stagnant air by keeping the air circulating while in storage. — J.J.

FAST CHARGE

Q Regarding David Gordon's "Dry Camp Power Use" question in the April issue about battery life while dry camping, I would like to relay our experiences in the Adirondack Mountains. We have a Jayco White Hawk and go to the Adirondacks in October when temperatures can vary between warm days and below-freezing nights. I use two batteries, but only one mounted on the trailer. The other I connect with jumper cables. The park we stay at is one where generator use is limited to seven hours per day. I connect the generator to the trailer and unhook the jumper cables. I have a large output battery charger so the converter charges the onboard battery while the charger maintains the spare.

We have found that by using this method I can easily keep both batteries charged in less than the allotted seven hours of generator use. I intend to get a 20-watt solar panel this year to save fuel in the generator.

Ray Devine, Lockport, New York

A Your plan for separating the batteries to enable faster charging, and using the second standalone battery charger, seems like a good one. It puts a lot of hours on the generator and costs a few dollars in gasoline, but, functionally, it sounds like it works. For a quieter and more consistent charging solution, however, the solar option is the way to go.

An important thing to consider is that the 20-watt solar panel you have in mind is very small for anything other than trickle-charging batteries or maintaining them in storage. For proper conditioning, especially with dual batteries, it would take days to replace the power drawn down in one night. It's more of an investment, but a pair of full-size solar panels, like in the 100-watt range (minimum) each and connected via a good quality charge controller, would be able to handle most of the recharging needs for your two batteries. Check with a reliable solar power specialist, like www.amsolar.com, for advice about assembling a system that's best for you. — J.J.

MOUSE TROUBLES AND MORE MOUSE TROUBLES

Q Fabric-softener sheets are another solution to the mouse problem Rex Norton inquired about in the "Mice Advice" letter in May's RV Clinic. We live in a heavily wooded area, and the trailer is housed under a pole barn. To keep critters out, we place several sheets inside the trailer and the storage compartments below, and have not had a rodent problem in five years. The aroma they emit, which we find pleasant, is an odor mice cannot tolerate. Also, if you have problems with rodents trying to get into your vehicle through the air intake, simply place a bar of Irish Spring soap under the hood in the air-filter compartment, and they will be repelled.

Nick Hovsepian, Bandon, Oregon

Q I had the same problem as Rex Norton — a mouse got in my trailer while I was sleeping! I went to the nearest town and told them of my problem, and they chuckled and said



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the mice probably walked right up the external power cord and snuck in at the gap in the power cord door. After that recommendation, I put some coarse steel wool around the power cord, right at the little slot on the power cord door, to fill the gap from a square door to a round power cord, and that has stopped the problem. Since that episode, I keep a small supply of steel wool in my toolbox.

Rik Bergethon, Pueblo, Colorado

A Rodent intrusion has been a problem as long as there have been RVs. There are mechanical ways to keep them out, such as the steel wool Rik mentioned, as well as other solutions such as window screen, RTV sealant or spray-foam insulation to block openings. There are also a wide variety of "chemical solutions" we've heard of, such as the dryer sheets, mothballs, scented oils and similar products. The best solution is a combination of these ideas as well as eliminating sources of

food inside the trailer. Thanks, guys, for your anti-mice solutions. — J.J.

AXLE WEIGHTS INEQUITY

Q Just traded my 2002 Cedar Creek in on a 2014 Montana, and the Montana has a much higher hitch weight. Our truck is 2005 Silverado 2500 HD crew cab, and the door label reads: GAWR front, 4,410 pounds; GAWR rear, 6,084 pounds; and GCWR, 9,200 pounds. Can you tell me why the GCWR is less than the sum of the axle ratings?

When I weigh the rig using a CAT certified scale, I am OK on both axle weights but somewhat over on GCWR. Only thing that comes to mind for me is braking capability. Is this difference true for all trucks?

Dave Roberts, Panacea, Florida

A When you refer to GCWR, or gross combination weight rating, I believe you mean GVWR, or gross vehicle weight rating. Nine-thousand two-hundred

pounds is a good GVWR for a 2500-series pickup, but its GCWR would be much higher because that also accounts for the trailer weight.

A GVWR calculation is the result of taking into account numerous components including axle capacities, braking, engine cooling and so forth. It's the number that results from the lowest capacity item in the package, or the weakest link in the chain, so to speak. In your case, it could be vehicle braking capacity or one of several other factors. The combined weight ratings of the axles is higher because the axles are chosen to handle the target GVWR, in this case, 9,200 pounds, and that also leaves some extra axle capacity before exceeding the overall GVWR. — J.J.

DECALS TIMES TWO

Q I have a 2008 Montana by Keystone. I have several decals that are cracking and peeling. I'm in the process of removing the bad ones, and I need to know what I can use to remove the glue/adhesive.

Keith Pauls, Jacksonville, Florida

Q I am experiencing a problem with the decals on the outside of my Heartland Landmark. After the fifth-wheel was only three years old, some of the decals started to shrink and wrinkle. As they shrink, they leave unsightly gluey residue behind. Now they have started to split right across the width of the decals. The problem is only with the brown decals. The rest didn't do that.

Is there a way of removing these decals and cleaning off the residue left behind, or at least a cleaner that will remove the glue? I would also like to know what could have caused this.

Charlene Tobias, Brantford, Ontario

A Decals age and fail due to sun exposure and ultraviolet rays, and like any other product, some are of better quality than others. In Tobias' case, the brown decals are failing because that color reacts differently to the sun's rays than the other colors. There are numerous decal adhesive removal



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products on the market in aerosol and pump-spray forms, and these can help with the glue removal process without damaging the RV's exterior surface. An Internet search for "decals removal" will reveal many solutions to the problem.

While the chemical glue removers will work, you can help them along by first removing any excess adhesive or stubborn decals with a heat gun, but be extremely careful; heat guns get very hot. Hair dryers also work and emit less heat. Find a plastic scraper to avoid damaging the skin. Use the heat gun to moderately warm the old decal and/or glue, and the scraper should be able to remove most of the old decal, after which you can scrape off the excess adhesive. Follow up with the use of the chemical product, and you should be good to go. — J.J.

TENT MOISTURE

Q We have a 2012 KZ Escape Spree. It's a hybrid, and the two tent-platform ends fold out. On our last camping trip, it rained for about five to six hours. When we woke up the next morning, I touched the top while I was lying in the bed. It was damp. I'm afraid if it had rained more, it would have leaked and started dripping on us. Do we need to do something to the fold-outs, or is this normal?

Andi Robinson, via email

A A certain amount of dampness is normal in tent fabric, especially after a long stretch of rain. Even if the tent fabric is completely waterproof outside, the inside collects a lot of condensation, which is probably what you're feeling. If in doubt, you can also apply fabric waterproofing, such as a ScotchGuard type of material, to the exterior after checking with the owner's manual on tent fabric care and treatment recommendations. — J.J.

ST VERSUS LT TIRES, PART 1

Q My trailer is a 2008 Everest 320T 32-foot with three slideout rooms. The total actual weight is 13,000 pounds. At this time, it is riding on

ST235/80R16 Carlisle Radial Trail trailer tires. Can I get truck tires, since they should last a year or two more than a trailer tire and are not rated for 65 MPH, as trailer tires are? Would I be in trouble if I did go with LT tires?

Pablo J. Garza, via email

A LT tires do not necessarily last longer than ST tires, if the type and quality of each is equal. However, many trailer owners have been changing from ST (special trailer) to LT (light truck) tires successfully. One reason, as you noted, is that trailer tires are designed and rated for a maximum of 65 MPH, and LT tires have higher ratings. However, the biggest reason is because of ST tire failures. — Ken Freund

ST VERSUS LT TIRES, PART 2

Q We own a Rockwood 31-foot travel trailer. The tires currently in use are ST205/75R15. Can I switch to light truck (LT series) tires utilizing the same rims?

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I was told by a tire dealer that the sidewalls of the LT tires are not as strong as the ST tires. What do you suggest?

David Nazareth, via email

A Sidewall strength varies among tire brands, models and load ratings, as well as between ST and LT tires. However, wheels are not rated according to sidewall strength. They are rated only for maximum load and inflation pressure, which should be stamped on the inside of the rim. Exceeding either rating could lead to failure. Just be sure that if you switch to LT tires they are weight rated at least as high as the original tires, and for the actual load they carry, and that they are inflated for their actual load. — **K.F.**

WHEEL CONCERN

Q I have a set of Eagle series 140 alloy rims, size 16x7. They originally came with Marathon ST230/85R16 E (rated 80 PSI) tires mounted on a Titanium fifth-wheel by Glendale RV (maximum 14,000 GVW). I want to mount Goodyear G614 LT235/85R16 G (rated 110 PSI) on the existing rims. Will these rims safely handle the higher PSI? The tire shop I use said they "could find no reason not to." I tried contacting the rim manufacturer and received no response. The two forums I searched came up with two different answers. One said no, and that it is stamped (80 PSI max) on the back of the rim. The other said that the 80 PSI is for the original tires only, and that the manufacturer of the rims told him that 110 PSI would be fine. He also said that he is using them and has had no problems.

Pat Zak, via email

A The "80 PSI" stamped into the wheel is the maximum allowable inflation pressure. This is put there by the wheel manufacturer, and they should know better than somebody on an online forum what the rims are designed for. While it is true that manufacturers do build a safety margin into their products, it is our view that it is not safe to exceed that rating. — **K.F.**

FURNACE QUIT

Q My RV's furnace quit working in the wee hours of the morning, and the pilot is lit. Also, while plugged into 30-amp shorepower, the interior lights are so dim they are useless. This was the first time out for the season in my Starcraft AR-ONE. Any help is appreciated.

Medea Mills, via email

A Since the RV was plugged in to shorepower, you should have full 12-volt DC power available, even with a dead battery, and you should first have checked if the power at the post was interrupted due to a power failure or circuit breaker tripping. Measure voltage at the battery. If voltage is below 12, it would be likely that the battery has failed, the power converter has stopped working or its circuit protection has tripped for some reason. Check these points and allow the battery to recharge, and I think you'll have heat again. — **K.F.**

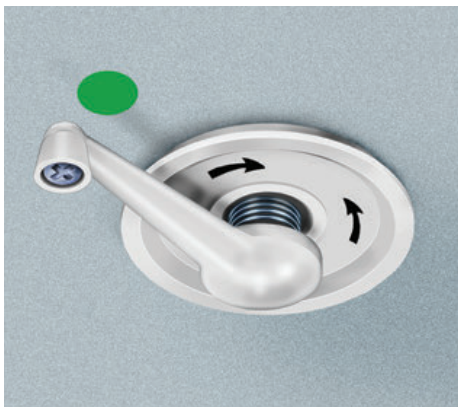
OVEN NOT LIGHTING

Q We have an Atwood Wedgewood Vision RV 17 stove/oven in our recently purchased 2004 Thor Colorado. The stovetop burners work properly, and the pilot light for the oven lights and stays lit. However, the oven burner will not ignite more than a weak flame. I have cleaned all orifices. Could the pressure valve at the back of the oven or the oven temperature valve be the culprit?

Paul Grohsmeyer, Dunlap, Illinois

A If the pilot stays lit, that should rule out a thermocouple problem. Since it appears that it's never been lit, there may be some factory defect in the gas delivery to the oven. Before replacing a lot of parts, I suggest having an RV shop or propane dealer measure the actual pressure at the range. If that is within specs, I would suspect the oven temperature valve. — **K.F.**

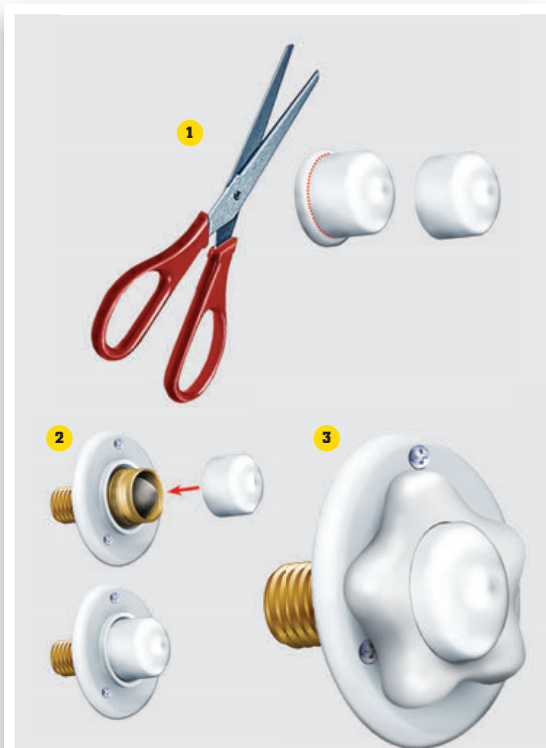
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Top Tip for Antenna

Many RVers have been dreadfully reminded — often by a low-hanging tree branch or an overpass — that they forgot to lower the rooftop TV antenna. And how many people fail to look up during a walk-around to ensure that the antenna is down? While lying in bed one morning and wondering whether the antenna was up or down, I thought of this tip: I simply cranked down the antenna completely and marked the ceiling at the end of the handle, using a green stick-on label for “go.” When cranking up the antenna, I make sure that the end of the handle is on the opposite side of the mark. Now I just have to remember to check the position of the handle before getting under way.

Larry MacDonald, Powell River, British Columbia



Replacing a Water Inlet Plug

Due to age and use, the city-water inlet plugs that keep the insides and threads protected from the elements tend to fail. To remedy the problem, I took the plugs that are used to protect the ends of an inline RV water-system filter before use and trimmed the shoulder so that it would fit nicely in the city-water hookup fitting. It's a good use of a part that is usually discarded.

Don Dunstan, Richmond, Texas

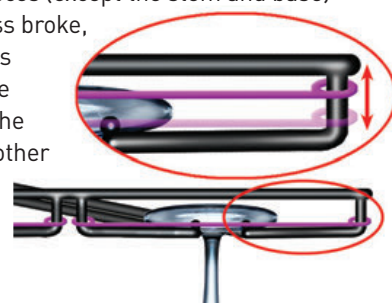


Transporting Glassware Safely

We like having wine glasses (as opposed to plastic) while traveling and had a problem with the stemware rack in our camper because the wine glasses would fall out while traveling. Adding a small wire rod across the open ends and wrapping the ends of the wire loosely around the vertical supports will stop the glasses from falling out, and it only needs to be lifted to insert or remove a glass.

Even before we solved the problem with the glasses falling out of the rack, my wife had decided the glasses needed some protection from banging against one another during travel, and she crocheted a cover for each glass. The cover provided an excellent wrap for containing the broken pieces (except the stem and base) and making cleanup easy. If a glass broke, she threw away the whole thing, as it took only a few minutes to create another cover out of scrap yarn. She has since created yarn-socks for other glasses we keep in a container in a cabinet.

Don Leeger, Maidens, Virginia 🇺🇸



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

Hot Tamales

Home to thousands of RVers each winter, McAllen, Texas, helped advance one woman's dream from humble beginnings to half a dozen restaurants



I am sure Delia couldn't have pulled this off in Duluth or Spokane. But here in McAllen, Texas, 5 miles from the Mexican border, she has a small restaurant chain — a local institution really — built solely on ethnic tastes and tradition. Started in her kitchen almost three decades ago, Delia's enterprise now has six sit-down res-

taurants that are open seven days a week and serve only freshly steamed tamales. And menudo is served on Saturdays and Sundays.

In the telling of it, it sounds dull, even disastrous in today's highly competitive restaurant business. For starters, Delia's menu board doesn't even have a picture on it. Tables and chairs are much like you find in your own kitchen. And this may very well be the secret of Delia's success. As her daughter Sofia explains it, "She has always wanted to keep things simple and very plain. And we do that. It's all about the tamales. The artistry goes into creating great tamales, not into the surroundings where you eat them."

Delia doesn't even try to compete with the plastic-roofed franchises that knock us numb with choices that cover the better part of a wall. She doesn't have to — customers know what they want before they walk in the door, and after that, it's a matter of fine-tuning.

The menu at Delia's, however, does fill a page. It has eight traditional items — pork is the most popular — and 10 specialty tamales, like spicy chicken cooked in green sauce and a cream-cheese-and-jalapeño tamale. The one made with sweet corn, brown sugar, coconut, pecans and raisins makes a great dessert, but you have to know that, as it is not singled out as a dessert item on the menu.

Delia Lubin started making tamales in 1987 and selling them to homes and businesses out of her car. It was a struggle, and her three daughters helped after school. Word of mouth is what Sofia attributes to her mother's success.

Local resident Nancy Millar agrees: "People rave about her tamales. They are head and shoulders above those of



PHOTO BY GEORGE CANTU

At Delia's Tamales, Sofia Lubin runs the business, while her mother, Delia, supervises the making of tamales as she has done for almost 30 years. Serving them without frills, Delia has taken tamales from being a holiday treat to an everyday staple.

anybody else. At Christmas — the high-demand season for tamales — the line outside Delia's can be a two-hour wait. And that's for the preordered takeouts."

This city of McAllen, population 130,000, is in the subtropical Rio Grand Valley in the southernmost reaches of Texas. In the winter, it's home to thousands of RVers who come year after year and take the title "Winter Texans."

During the past decade, McAllen has become a promised land for shoppers from both sides of the border. Thirty-five percent of the retail business here comes from Mexico. Because retailers go where the money is, McAllen offers shopping normally found only in big-city malls where competition and turnover are intense.

The same can be said for places to eat. The quality and variety of food here exceeds what we expect in a city this size. This, too, probably accounts for Delia's success in a niche market with a one-item menu.

Sofia is the company's chief operating officer. Delia, now in her late 60s, is very much involved. "It is hard to get her to sit down," Sofia says. "When we can't find her around the office, we know she is in the back helping make tamales."

Delia, an immigrant from Mexico, opened her first restaurant in 1998. What she built here, I believe, she could not have done anywhere else in the world. It is a success story that has "only in America" and "only in Texas" written all over it.

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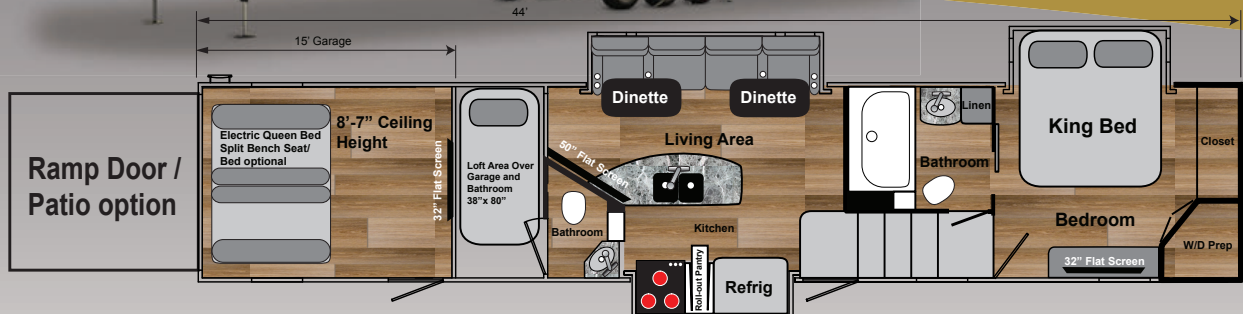
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