

FIRST LOOK! TOP TRAILER TRENDS FOR 2015

TRAILER LIFE

FOLLOW THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

MARCH 2015

Grand Illusions

- ▶ Luxury Living in a Lightweight Cougar
- ▶ 10 Front-Lounge Fifth-Wheels



TOP THIS!

Slideout-Topper
Fabric Facelift

I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW

Entry-Door
Window Upgrade

NOW THAT'S EURO-STYLE
ITALIAN! STOVE INSTALL

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Tour: Great Smoky Mountains

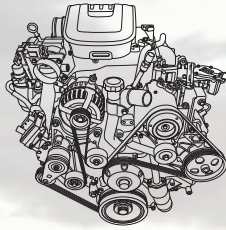
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Learn: Iowa's Amana Colonies

+ 11 HISTORICAL HOT SPOTS

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The new Silverado HD was designed to work harder for you. Visit chevy.com/silverado to learn more about the Silverado 2500HD and 3500HD trailering capabilities and the latest Chevy towing technologies from our online trailering guide.



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¹Requires 3500HD Crew Cab DRW 4WD with available Duramax 6.6L Turbo-Diesel V8 engine. Before you buy a vehicle or use it for trailering, carefully review the trailering section of the Owner's Manual. The weight of passengers, cargo and options or accessories may reduce the amount you can tow. ²The Chevrolet Silverado HD received the lowest number of problems per 100 vehicles among large heavy-duty pickups in the proprietary J.D. Power 2014 Initial Quality StudySM Study based on responses from 86,118 new-vehicle owners, measuring 239 models and measures opinions after 90 days of ownership. Proprietary study results are based on experiences and perceptions of owners surveyed in February-May 2014. Your experiences may vary. Visit jdpower.com. ³Dependability based on longevity: 1987-April 2013 Full-Size Pickup registrations. ©2015 General Motors. All rights reserved. Chevrolet® Chevrolet emblem® Chevy™ Duramax® Silverado®

2015 model shown.

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CHEVROLET



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On the cover: The 2015 Chevy Silverado High Country easily tows a Keystone Cougar XLite 30RLI. Photo by Scott Hirko

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New Models Create a Buzz

Itty-bitty trailers to luxury condos-on-wheels continue to dominate a red-hot RV industry



Funny how trends get recycled. While perusing the displays at the big RV trade show in Louisville, Kentucky, late last year, I couldn't help but notice the number of fifth-wheels featuring front living rooms. The concept is not new; front living rooms have popped up a number of times in the past couple of decades. They become popular for a while and then seem to fade away.

Devoting the raised front section to living room furniture and entertainment systems is truly conducive to relaxing in an environment that more closely emulates that of a stationary home. The latest crop is more spectacular than ever, highlighted by striking banisters, plush Ultraleather couches and theater seating, huge flat-screen TVs and, of course, a fireplace. These rooms are warm and inviting, and are described in a number of models in the survey article on page 56.

It was also evident by cruising the show that the spectrum of trailer and fifth-wheel models has expanded greatly. Prospective buyers have choices that range from itty-bitty trailers that can be towed by just about anything on wheels to gloriously outfitted fifth-wheels that make full-time living more pleasurable than ever. The number of new models being produced by the RV industry is breathtaking. Six hundred of them are featured in the biggest *RV Buyers Guide* we've ever published, a magazine that recently went on sale and is being distributed nationwide. We've compiled a sampling of the variety of trailers and fifth-wheels that are new for 2015 in the article starting on page 65.

The RV industry has responded to overwhelming demand for trailers and fifth-wheels. In 2014, around 300,000 towables were delivered to dealers. That represents the biggest portion of the industry's total RV output. This year's sales are poised to be even better, and manufacturers in Elkhart, Indiana, where most RVs are built, will continue to work in overdrive.

It only makes sense that trailers and fifth-wheels are so popular. Towable RVs are versatile and offer the best value for the total investment. The key element is the tow vehicle, which almost always doubles as primary or secondary transportation when not pulling the trailer. That makes the cost of RV ownership practical and affordable.

Lightweight trailers will likely continue to lead the charge in 2015, with travel trailers in longer lengths to accommodate vast amenities. Toy haulers with patio options are growing quickly in popularity, and smaller trailers with retro styling are bringing smiles to those who relish simplicity.

Variety — that's what the RV lifestyle is all about. 📧

— Bob Livingston, publisher

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A WONDERFUL LIFE

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With Flying Colors

I read January's America's Outback column by Bill Graves, and the picture of the T-28 Trojan at California's Palm Springs Air Museum brought back many memories. I well remember my first flight in the T-28. I was sitting in the front seat with the canopy open, as my instructor started the aircraft. We had a fire on start. As the flames rolled up over the cowling near me, my instructor shut off the fuel. When the flames subsided, the instructor asked the fire guard how bad the fire had been. The reply of "Not bad" made a lasting impression. We cranked again and completed the flight. I recently discovered that same airplane (bureau numbers and squadron markings intact) at a small museum at the Akron, Ohio, airport.

My best friend (also a *Trailer Life* subscriber) and I flew in the same USMC squadron overseas. He was miffed that he missed visiting the Palm Springs Air Museum on his last trip to Southern California.

Bill Goodwin, Cambridge, Ohio



Have GPS, Will Travel

I served for 14 years in the U.S. Army and lived in the dirt and mud enough that I swore I'd never "camp out" again. Now that I'm within several years of retirement and want to travel, I've been studying full-time RVing and ended up buying my first travel trailer and good-sized tow vehicle. I'm loving both, and I'm enjoying your magazine, but I can't believe your editorial staff failed to take advantage of the opportunity to extol the virtues of the Good Sam GPS in response to John Harrigan's

Texas Train

Growing up as a kid in the '70s, my folks took us traveling from coast to coast in an old Chevy crew cab and travel trailer. As I became older, I took their lead and took my honeymoon in an RV. Over the years, my wife, Trish, and I have traveled from Nova Scotia to San Diego and from Juneau to Key West. We crisscrossed this beautiful country, taking in many places from the articles I read in *Trailer Life*. Now that our kids are older, we take combinations of our trailer, boat, mountain bikes and ATVs, depending on what everyone wants to do.

People at work thought I was crazy for taking a month off every summer to go RV camping with the family, but I do believe I had the best of times, and when I retire we will be doing the same with the grandkids!

Tom Loesing, Colleyville, Texas



January letter, "Going Mapless...Not!"

My old GPSs often led me astray, usually to some vacant lot in the middle of nowhere. It got so bad that my wife would see me setting up the GPS and say, "What country do you think we'll end up in this time?" When I bought the new trailer and tow vehicle, I joined the Good Sam Club and also bought the Good Sam/Rand McNally GPS, and have yet to have it goof.

No GPS will get you to a doorstep, but this baby gets me a lot closer than the old units ever did, and it does it without fail. Further, it warns me of curves that could be hazardous to a tow combo, and it offers tons more information including data that is of particular interest to RVers. The only failing is the painfully dim lighting, but by keeping it on the Daytime setting I avoid that.

I still carry maps, just in case, but I have full faith in the Good Sam GPS.

Bill Card, Orem, Utah

Window Dressing

After reading December 2014's Hands On article by Kevin Livingston about the Frost King window-insulation kit, my husband and I decided to try it once we got to Texas for the winter.

We checked at one Lowe's and two Home Depot locations, but none had the Frost King shrink film. Store associates didn't even know what we were talking about. Calling ahead would have saved time and gas.

Driving past a local hardware store on our way back to our fifth-wheel, we stopped to see if they had window film in stock. Yes! One box for \$15.39 plus tax was enough to cover the windows. We left two windows uncovered in case we want cross-ventilation. The shrink film is helping to keep the cold out and heat in.

**Sandra Minger
Vicksburg, Michigan**

Mirror Image

Just a comment on the December 2014 cover photo. You describe it as being towed by a properly equipped Chevrolet Silverado 1500. I beg to differ. The truck has tiny sideview mirrors — hardly "proper" for towing an 8-foot-wide trailer.

Bill Tobey, Nakusp, British Columbia

Why, Why, Why?

Why is it that every new travel trailer for the past few years has brown cabinets and trim? We love our 2007

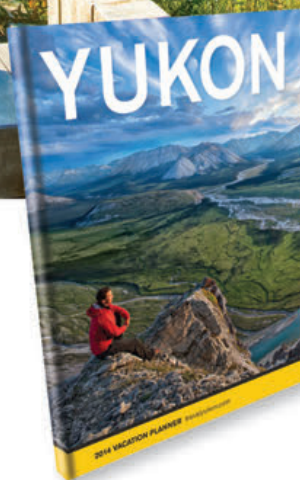
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LETTERS

Rockwood Signature Ultra Lite 8315 with white cabinets and woodwork, and are hoping it will hold up until we can find white woodwork again.

Sue Robinson, Hanover, Pennsylvania

Why do travel trailer manufacturers all seem to be using dark-tinted auto-styled windows? I love natural sunlight. The selection of travel trailers that have minimal tint or clear windows

these days is very limited.

Joe D'Onofrio, Elmhurst, Illinois

Why is it that dealers can sell RVs quickly but have such a limited technical staff that there's a 60-day backlog to get something repaired?

Robert Turner, Garland, Texas

Just Weighing In

Many of your readers write in about

rigs that they are planning to purchase. As long as the weight of the trailer is "close" to the towing capacity of their proposed truck, they feel they have done their due diligence.

My message is, don't skimp on the tow truck power and capacity, and don't buy too much trailer for the truck you have. Leave extra towing capacity of somewhere between 10 and 35 percent. When the grade is steep, when the air is thin, when the temperature is high, when the winds are blowing and when the road is long, you still want to get to your destination safely and comfortably.

James Ward, Worthington, Ohio

Don't Toss Your Tires

There are many problems that may occur with your trailer tires. If you happen to have a problem, remember to contact the tire manufacturer prior to disposing of the tire carcass. I had a dealer give me wrong information concerning a tire warranty — I disposed of the bad tire. After a conversation with another trailer owner, I had the idea that the tire manufacturer might help me. I found out that the manufacturer's policy was not to give warranty service without the tire. I also learned to look at trailer manufacturer forums and search the Internet for complaints about that brand of tire (the complaints section on www.vehicletire.com is a good source). Armed with some history data and a second tire failure (I kept that tire), I was able to recoup some of the expenses for my replacement tires.

John Taylor, Gleason, Wisconsin

Travel Fan

I greatly look forward to each issue of *Trailer Life*. I love the tech articles for my husband, Dan, and the new product info, but what I love the most are the articles on places to visit.

Fan Bender

New Providence, Pennsylvania 📧

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PHOTO BY ROSS LOEHR



Tiptoe Through the Tulip Route

Every spring, Washington's Skagit Valley is carpeted in color and celebrated with a monthlong festival

article by Paula Loehr

Bring on the blossoms! During the entire month of April, the flower-growing Skagit Valley in northwest Washington celebrates the glorious arrival of spring with its annual Tulip Festival. Friendly towns like La Conner and Mount Vernon welcome visitors from all over the world to amazing, color-drenched tulip fields. The brilliant floral displays — expansive bands of sunny yellow, vibrant red, deep purple, orange and bright pink — stretch on and on, the stuff of photographers' dreams. The dates for peak tulip watching are difficult to predict, as Mother Nature determines tulips' blooming patterns. The element of surprise is half the fun, and the Tulip Routes (driving and cycling) guide expectant gazers past hundreds of flowering acres.

Tulip Festival events address a wide spectrum of preferences. La Conner hosts an old-fashioned parade (think marching bands, farm animals, clowns and pampered pets), and Mount

Vernon's downtown Street Fair presents performing musicians, food vendors and more than 100 juried arts-and-crafts booths. Paintings, photography, jewelry, home furnishings and pottery are exhibited at art shows staged at local restaurants, a winery and plant nurseries, and even in a schoolhouse.

The festival is designed as a driving tour, and two participating gardens — Tulip Town and Roozen-Gaarde, both in Mount Vernon — offer weekday parking for tour buses and RVs. Due to tremendous festival attendance on Saturdays and Sundays, RVers are advised to park their rigs offsite on weekends and ride bicycles, drive a tow vehicle or rent a car to access the valley's gardens.

Members of the Roozen family have cultivated tulips in Holland and the United States since the early 18th century. The Roozens' breathtaking display garden contains more than 250,000 bulbs, including crocus, yellow daffodils, hyacinths, purple iris

and a grand assortment of tulips, plus a real Dutch windmill.

Tom DeGoede's Tulip Town features three gardens, including a pond and waterwheel display with unique hybrid tulips. At Tulip Town, you can buy a freshly plucked bouquet and browse through the floral-themed art gallery and gift shop. Why not indulge in an espresso or a bite to eat at the Tulip Café, then take a trolley ride to enjoy elevated views of surrounding fields?

Tulip-seeking RVers can stay year-round at Mount Vernon RV Park (800-385-9895, www.rvonthego.com/washington/mount-vernon-rv-campground) or nearby Burlington/Anacortes KOA (360-724-5511, www.koa.com/campgrounds/burlington). State, county and city parks also offer overnight camping.

For more information and a printable Tulip Festival map or interactive map with GPS coordinates, call 360-428-5959 or visit www.tulipfestival.org.



Set the Night on Fire!

Hot off the press: Livin' Lite RV, manufacturer of light-weight aluminum-frame and composite towables, has introduced the Aluma-Lite Ignite, a flashy toy hauler badged as a 2016 model. As with other Livin' Lite models, the door and floor framing are made of tubular aluminum. Inside, the trailer has handcrafted decorative wood cabinetry doors, bringing a residential feel to the toy hauler.

The Ignite is offered in four floorplans in 24-, 26-, 28- and 30-foot lengths; all models are 8½ feet wide. Bold graphics on its fiberglass exterior have a custom-painted look and feature a liquid-flame design. Weights range from 5,000 to 6,000

pounds, and Scott Tuttle, Livin' Lite president, claims they are "true half-ton towables."

The models feature cargo areas from 14 to 20 feet long that, the company claims, are the largest in the industry and offer multiple sleeping arrangements. Fold-up sofas/beds and dinettes/beds with portable tables are part of the package. Luxuriously equipped kitchens and bedrooms are also part of the Ignite's features. Toy hauler ramp door openings are 7 feet wide, and interior headroom is higher than 7 feet. Freshwater capacity is 63 gallons, while gray- and black-water capacity is 28 gallons. MSRPs range from \$35,000 to \$45,000. Livin' Lite, 574-862-2228, www.livinlite.com



NEWSWIRE

HAPPY CAMPER



Lance Trailer Winner

Rob Cox of Anaheim, California, was the lucky winner of a new 2015 Lance 1575 ultra-light travel trailer valued at \$25,540 that was given away at the 62nd Annual California RV Show, held in Pomona, California, last October. Cox was among more than 10,000 entries.

Cox is looking forward to seeing the country in the trailer, starting his tour in Arizona. As a boy, he and his family enjoyed camping, and now he plans to take his friends along in his own Lance trailer. The 15-foot 5-inch trailer weighs 2,700 pounds (dry), making it towable with a small SUV or truck. The trailer sleeps four, so owners like Cox can bring a few buddies to go fishing and enjoy the great outdoors. Lance Campers utilizes aluminum and Azdel composite panels for lightweight durability.

New York State's Sweet Event

Ever wonder how maple syrup is made? You can find out at New York's Maple Weekend, celebrating its 20th year in 2015. Despite its name, the event actually takes place on two weekends, March 21 and 22 and 28 and 29, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day. Producers from across the state will welcome families to their farms to experience firsthand how mouthwatering maple syrup and other maple products are made. Visitors can taste the syrup and enjoy family-friendly activities, plus purchase products directly from the source at more than 150 locations.

New York ranks as one of the top maple-producing states in the country. As spring temperatures rise in late February and early March, maple trees and sugar bushes come alive with activity. In northern New York, when the sap begins to drip through the sugaring lines, it's a sure sign that maple season has begun.

Maple Weekend
www.mapleweekend.com

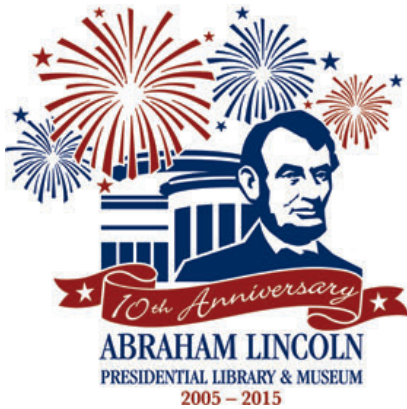
INDUSTRY NEWS



Thor Acquires Towable Manufacturers

Thor Industries announced the acquisition of towable RV manufacturer Cruiser RV (CRV) and luxury fifth-wheel manufacturer DRV by its Heartland Recreational Vehicles subsidiary. "We are pleased to welcome CRV and DRV to the Thor family. Cruiser RV has a long history of

building lightweight travel trailers that appeal to a broad base of RV consumers, while DRV brings a strong presence in the high-end fifth-wheel market," said Bob Martin, Thor president and CEO. "We see a number of opportunities to leverage Thor's strength in purchasing and distribution to the CRV and DRV businesses, while utilizing their existing market strengths to enhance our overall position in lightweight travel trailers, which has been one of the fastest-growing segments of the RV market, as well as luxury fifth-wheels, where we previously had a more limited presence."



By the People, for the People

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois, turns 10 this year, marking the milestone with special events, theater presentations, lectures and exhibits.



An exhibit produced in cooperation with the Chicago History Museum runs through February 2016 and focuses on five key Lincoln speeches that illustrate his evolving views on slavery. More than 120 artifacts complete the exhibit, including Lincoln's bloody gloves from the night he was assassinated, the bed he died in and a carriage used by Abraham and Mary Lincoln.

Coming this April is "The Battle Hymn Story," a multimedia theater presentation with music and special effects, which joins two other staged productions, "Lincoln's Eyes" (focusing on key issues of Lincoln's presidency) and "Ghosts of the Library" (in which an actor appears and disappears on stage with help from special effects). The "To See Jerusalem Before I Die" exhibit opens in August and examines Lincoln's relationships with Jewish friends, supporters and opponents.

The library also houses material from Illinois' history and the Civil War, original copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1857) and the earliest newspaper published in Illinois (1814).

For a list of 10th-anniversary events, visit www.tenyearslincoln.com. For RV park information, go to www.visitspringfieldillinois.com.
Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum
 800-610-2094
www.lincolnlibraryandmuseum.com

Springtime 2015 RV Shows

March 5-8

Central New York RV and Camping Show and Sale

New York State Fairgrounds,
 Syracuse, New York
 877-228-8240
www.cnyrvshow.com

Greater Philadelphia RV Show

Greater Philadelphia Expo Center
 Oaks, Pennsylvania
 412-798-8661
www.phillyrvshow.com

March 6-8

Greater Atlanta RV Show

Georgia World Congress Center
 Atlanta, Georgia
 800-848-6247, www.gsevents.com

March 13-15

Virginia RV Show

Hampton Roads Convention Center,
 Hampton, Virginia
 804-243-8847, www.gsevents.com

March 19-22

Flint Camper and RV Show

Perani Arena and Event Center
 Flint, Michigan
 517-349-8881, www.marvac.org

March 20-22

York Campers World RV Show

York Expo Center
 York, Pennsylvania
 610-767-5026, www.yorkrvshow.net

44th RV, Camping and Travel Show

Indoor Sports Center
 Rockford, Illinois
 815-997-1744
www.rkfdrvshow.com

March 25-29

Progressive Insurance Northwest Sportshow

Minneapolis Convention Center
 Minneapolis, Minnesota
www.northwestsportshow.com

March 27-29

New Hampshire Camping and RV Show

New Hampshire Sportplex,
 Bedford, New Hampshire
 603-736-5540
www.nhlovescampers.com

Northwest Michigan Camper and RV Show

Grand Traverse Civic Center
 Traverse City, Michigan
 517-349-8881, www.marvac.org

Chattanooga RV Show

Chattanooga Convention Center
 Chattanooga, Tennessee
 941-780-0538
www.thechattanoogarvshow.com

New Mexico RV and Travel Show

Albuquerque Convention Center
 Albuquerque, New Mexico
 702-348-1570, www.gsevents.com

April 10-12

Rhode Island RV and Camping Show and Sale

Rhode Island Convention Center
 Providence, Rhode Island
 804-337-8463, www.gsevents.com

April 15-18

RVIA Spring California RV Show

L.A. Fairplex, Pomona, California
 818-248-6600
www.thebestrvshow.com





Saga of the Silver Bullet

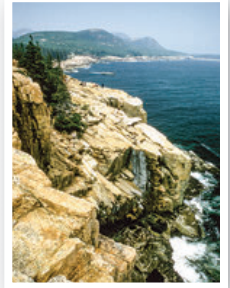
The first Airstream trailer was built in 1929, a tent contraption that Wally Byam made on a Model T chassis. The tent was replaced with a teardrop-shaped shelter, and a stove and ice chest were added. The first factory-produced Airstream, nicknamed the Silver Bullet because of its airplane-fuselage-inspired design, rolled out in 1931, making the company the oldest U.S. manufacturer of RVs. Today, the retro design is still in style, and Airstream's trailer production is at its highest level since the 1970s. In fact, the company can't roll them out fast enough to meet demand, and ground has been broken for a major factory expansion that eventually will increase production capacity by 50 percent.

Over the years the polished trailers have cameoed in Hollywood movies and served as a NASA Mobile Quarantine Facility for astronauts returning from lunar missions, including *Apollo 11*'s Buzz Aldrin, Neil Armstrong and Michael Collins when they came back from the moon.

Airstream builds 50 trailers every week at the plant in Jackson Center, Ohio — all riveted by hand. The aerodynamic styling translates into better fuel economy and easier towability. Airstreams are popular with baby boomers as well as the younger set, fascinated with the trailers' classic lines, riveted aluminum construction and nostalgic history.

Airstream, 877-596-6111, www.airstream.com

Acadia National Park Road Detours



If you're heading to Maine's Acadia National Park this season, be aware that detours are planned for vehicles exceeding certain height and width restrictions along Park Loop Road, the primary avenue through the scenic national park. Large vehicles will be rerouted on portions of the popular drive during rehabilitation of two historic stone bridges.

Intermittent detours will take place on the Sieur de Monts Springs Bridge from April 27 through June 8 and on the Day Mountain Bridge from May 11 through June 19. Check the Acadia National Park website, www.nps.gov/acad, for news about temporary detours during your visit.

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Pacific Northwest Car Museum

The LeMay-America's Car Museum (ACM) is a hot attraction in Tacoma, Washington, and the largest automotive museum in North America. Said David Madeira, president and CEO of the four-story, 165,000-square-foot facility, "We see ACM as an enveloping cultural experience instead of just another stationary car museum, constantly rolling out new ideas and exhibits. That's what sets us apart."

The museum hosts events like Cars & Cigars, with tastings from Montecristo cigars and Seattle's El Gaucho restaurant, the Wheels & Heels fundraiser,

the Vintage Motorcycle Festival and the Pacific Northwest Concours d'Elegance. On the first Tuesday of each month, a speaker picks a car and offers a peek into its history.



ACM's Family Zone includes a make-and-take art area, a pinewood derby track and road-trip games from past decades. "We offer something for everyone — from kids to adults and casual museum-goers to diehard gearheads," said Madeira. "We've built a world-class museum that tells America's story through the evolution of the automobile, and we're looking forward to sharing more of that story with audiences in the U.S. and around the world."

Now open is "F-Series: The Truck That Grew Up with America," an exhibit chronicling the 67-year history of Ford's top-selling pickup. The exhibit includes everything from a 1948 F-1 to the 2015 F-150. Highlights include a customized 1956 F-100 in brilliant orange and a restored 1952 Mercury M-3, a rebranded version of the truck sold primarily in Canada. The Ford exhibit runs through June 2015.

877-902-8490, www.lemaymuseum.org 📍

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LET THERE BE LIGHT

Explore the spectacular scenery and luminous history of 11 Washington lighthouses on a Puget Sound road trip

We think it was serendipity. A chance conversation a few years ago at the cozy Rainbow's End RV Park in Sequim, Washington, kindled a fascination with lighthouses and eventually spurred our recent trip around Washington's Puget Sound region. The day after that dinner conversation, we hiked 11 miles round-trip to the

New Dungeness Lighthouse near the end of a sand spit that pokes into the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Soon afterward we joined the nonprofit New Dungeness Light Station Association and served our first one-week tour as volunteer lighthouse keepers.

A few years later, after our third volunteer stint at New Dungeness, we launched a tour of 10 more Puget Sound lighthouses, setting off in our tow vehicle from an RV park in Sequim. The first, Point No Point Light, seemed a good place to start. Not only is it the oldest lighthouse on Puget Sound, it's the headquarters of the U.S. Lighthouse Society, a national educational nonprofit that is a compelling voice for lighthouse preservation. The comical name is a bonus.

Dating from 1880, Point No Point is located near the small town of Hansville on the northern end of the Kitsap Peninsula. As at New Dungeness, the light continues to aid seafarers. Although an aerobeacon now serves as the navigational aid,



On the west side of San Juan Island, the 1919 Lime Kiln Point Lighthouse still sends a beacon across Haro Strait.

the fourth-order Fresnel lens (see "What's a Fresnel Lens" below), installed in 1915, remains in the lantern room. A vacation rental occupies half of the keeper's residence, while the other half serves as the Lighthouse Society offices.

Vital to U.S. commerce since colonial times, the nation's lighthouses have changed profoundly in the past half-century. In the 1960s technological advances led the Coast Guard to begin automating lighthouses and removing keepers. Without someone present, the buildings suffered deterioration and vandalism. The good news is that many were rescued from this fate — frequently by local volunteer organizations, sometimes in concert with state or local government, often with assistance from the U.S. Lighthouse Society.

Port Townsend's Point Wilson Light marks the place where maritime traffic from the Pacific Ocean bound

for Seattle, Tacoma and Bremerton makes a sweeping right turn. It's a critical spot, and unlike Admiralty Head across Admiralty Inlet, Point Wilson still serves as an active navigational aid and remains Coast Guard property. Tours of the 1914 combination lighthouse and fog-signal building are offered on summer Saturday afternoons.

Departing Sequim with our trailer, we steered for Port Townsend, having reserved space onboard the 11 a.m. ferry to Coupeville and Fort Casey State Park. On a bluff above the main entrance to Puget Sound, we viewed the Spanish Revival-style Admiralty Head Lighthouse. It combines keeper's quarters and a light tower with a connecting ground-floor portico. Entering service in 1903, it replaced a wooden 1861 version inconveniently located just where the Army chose to construct a gun emplacement in 1899.

Lingering over the view from a



(Top) The authors' travel trailer rides the ferry from Port Townsend to Whidbey Island. Washington State Ferries suggests that space be reserved in advance for trailers and motorhomes. **(Above)** An RV cruises downtown in Anacortes.

VISITING THE SAN JUAN ISLANDS, HOME TO FOUR LIGHTHOUSES, WAS ESSENTIAL IN OUR QUEST TO SEE AS MANY PUGET SOUND LIGHTHOUSES AS WE COULD MANAGE

newly reconstructed lantern room, we inspected two beautiful fourth-order Fresnel lenses in the small museum and browsed the gift shop for souvenirs and reference material. Although owned by Washington State Parks, the lighthouse is staffed by



Washington ferries crisscross Puget Sound carrying passengers, automobiles, RVs and trucks. Here a ferry approaches Friday Harbor on San Juan Island.



What's a Fresnel Lens?

Invented for lighthouse use by French physicist Augustin-Jean Fresnel in 1822, the Fresnel lens consists of precise crystal prisms that capture light from an illumination source (originally, a kerosene oil lamp) and produce a strong beam to pierce the darkness. Installed in North American and European lighthouses from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, these lenses safely guided mariners. The largest size, called a first-order, is 12 feet tall and casts a beam 20 miles or more out to sea. Smaller lenses, generally fourth- through sixth-order, were used in harbors, bays and estuaries. Historic Fresnel lenses are on display at many Washington lighthouses, and some are still in use.

docents who volunteer as tour guides, gift shop attendants and maintenance workers.

Visiting the San Juan Islands, home to four lighthouses, was essential in our quest to see as many Puget Sound lighthouses as we could manage. Leaving our trailer at Fidalgo Bay Resort in Anacortes, we negotiated the ferry with our tow vehicle. Onboard we enjoyed views of snug harbors, sandy beaches and forested hills, arriving an hour later in Friday Harbor.

The contrast between the two lighthouses on San Juan Island, the largest island in the San Juan archipelago, was startling. At the island's southernmost tip, the 1935 Cattle Point Lighthouse appeared abandoned, boarded up, forelorn. An overgrown path leads about ¼ mile from Cattle Point Road to the lighthouse where the views are dramatic and so is the erosion around the building's foundation. We hope that inclusion in the new San Juan Islands National Monument foreshadows future preservation efforts.

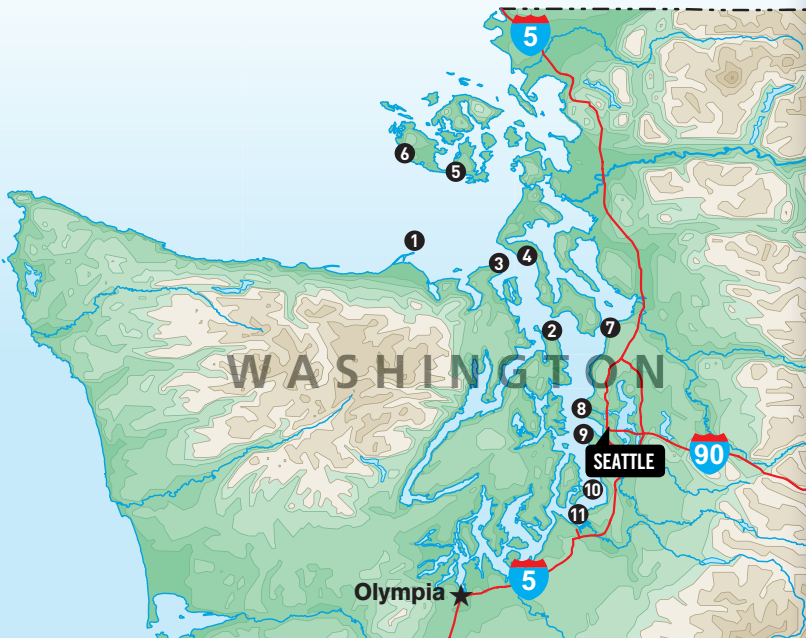
Lime Kiln Lighthouse faces British Columbia's Vancouver Island across Haro Strait. Here in Lime Kiln Point State Park, we found an interpretive center, two well-maintained keeper's quarters occupied by park personnel and the 1919 octagonal light tower and fog building.

The light still serves as a navigational aid. The fog-signal room is seasonally occupied by Lime Kiln Acoustic Observatory researchers recording sounds of resident orcas. Alas, we saw no cetaceans at this spot renowned for whale observation. Volunteers operate the interpretive center and open the lighthouse tower two evenings a week during summer.

Time permitted us to wander through American and English Camps, two separate units of San Juan Island National Historical Park. Here we learned of an obscure mid-19th-

Puget Sound Lighthouse Tour

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1) New Dungeness | 5) Cattle Point | 9) Alki Point |
| 2) Point No Point | 6) Lime Kiln Point | 10) Point Robinson |
| 3) Point Wilson | 7) Mukilteo | 11) Browns Point |
| 4) Admiralty Head | 8) West Point | |



We'll Leave the Light On

Volunteer opportunities for lighthouse lovers

Many Puget Sound lighthouses are run by volunteers from local nonprofit organizations. Supporters, including traveling RVers, donate their time, money or both, and membership fees are usually affordable at \$10 to \$50 per year. This money is used to maintain the light stations, provide public access and more.

Admiralty Head Lighthouse on Whidbey Island employs volunteers as tour guides and gift shop staff, as well as for general maintenance. No experience is necessary. www.admiraltyhead.wsu.edu

Tacoma's **Brown's Point Lighthouse** uses volunteers for occasional tasks and short- and long-term projects. For longer time commitments, volunteers take on committee or board responsibilities. The 1903 keeper's cottage is rented out for short stays as a fundraiser. www.pointsnortheast.org

San Juan Island's **Lime Kiln Point Lighthouse** needs assistance with many ongoing park projects and provides training for members who conduct lighthouse tours. www.friendsoflimekilnsociety.org

North of Seattle, **Mukilteo Light Station** offers volunteer opportunities for serving as lighthouse docents, working in the gift shop, gardening and researching the lighthouse's history. www.mukilteohistorical.org

New Dungeness Lighthouse in Sequim provides a unique experience for its members. Volunteers may serve one-week shifts living in the keeper's quarters at the end of a 5½-mile sand spit. As keepers, they provide tower tours and complete maintenance chores — and pay a fee to do it. New members and donations are always welcome. www.newdungenesslighthouse.com

Point No Point Lighthouse members conduct lighthouse tours, manage the museum store and more on the northern end of the Kitsap Peninsula. The old keeper's house is a vacation rental, and all proceeds benefit the lighthouse property. www.pnplighthouse.com

The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary gives tours of two Puget Sound lighthouses — **Point Wilson** in Port Townsend and **Alki Point** in West Seattle — and offers volunteer opportunities for members. www.join.cgaux.org

LET THERE BE LIGHT

century chapter in our history when sovereignty over the San Juan Islands was disputed between the United States and Great Britain.

Given most lighthouses' limited open-to-the-public hours, we had several days for other sights and activities. We strolled Port Townsend's Main Street and ogled its boat-packed harbor — especially the vintage wooden boats — and explored downtown Anacortes. We discovered the nearby communities of La Conner and tiny Edison with its memorable Breadfarm bakery and café, and walked Anacortes' Tommy Thompson Trail.

The chance to nose around in a beautiful and vibrant city, not to mention five more lighthouses in Seattle's vicinity, justified moving our trailer south from Anacortes.

The volunteer spirit, and its significance for the preservation and maintenance of lighthouses, is manifest at Mukilteo Light Station. Dating from 1906, its photogenic, wood-frame

At the end of America's longest sand spit, driftwood piles up on the beach at New Dungeness Light Station.



lighthouse and fog-signal building continue to serve as aids to navigation, employing its original fourth-order Fresnel lens with a range of 12 nautical miles. Now owned by the City of Mukilteo, the lighthouse stands in a park with two keeper's dwellings. Mukilteo Historical Society volunteers serve as caretakers, operating a museum and gift shop, and giving lighthouse tours on summer weekends.

Seattle's two lighthouses flank

its harbor, Elliott Bay. West Point lighthouse began guiding vessels here in 1881, and Alki Point was first lit in 1913. Today, West Point is part of the city's Discovery Park, while Alki Point is the only Puget Sound area lighthouse to remain an active Coast Guard station.

The Coast Guard continues to take excellent care of Alki Point — the district admiral resides in an original keeper's dwelling. The Coast Guard

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Auxiliary conducts guided tours and opens a small museum one weekend each month. We enjoyed the fine display of fog-signaling equipment, a Fresnel lens and the view from the lantern room.

West Point Lighthouse, though restored, is not currently open to the public. No scheduled tours are offered. While roofs have been replaced on the two keepers' dwellings, they are otherwise in a deteriorated state. It's also a challenge to get there involving a 3-mile round-trip hike or, for seniors and the disabled, obtaining a parking pass from the visitor center.

Once again we relied on the ferries — this time completing a loop, sans trailer, from West Seattle to Vashon Island, then from Vashon Island to Tacoma, returning to Seattle via Browns Point — to visit two lighthouses south of Seattle.

Point Robinson on Maury Island (connected to Vashon) marks the halfway point on the water route



(Above from left) Hansville's Point No Point Lighthouse, home to the United States Lighthouse Society, is Puget Sound's oldest lighthouse. The New Dungeness Lighthouse tower commands a sweeping view of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. At Mukilteo Light Station, the original Fresnel lens still aids seagoing navigators.

between Seattle and Tacoma. A combination fog signal and lighthouse began operating in 1885 and continues as an active navigational aid. The Coast Guard maintains radar and radio-signal towers here but leases most of the

property and buildings to the Vashon Parks District. We picnicked here but missed out on a tour — no one showed up to open the lighthouse. If you go, make sure to call ahead.

The 1903 Browns Point Lighthouse

Northwood Mfg., Circle 136 on Reader Service Card



If You Go

The following websites can be a big help in planning lighthouse trips throughout Washington's Puget Sound region and beyond:

Lighthouse Friends
www.lighthousefriends.com

United States Lighthouse Society
www.uslhs.org

sits about 6 miles southwest of Point Robinson, marking the northern approach into Commencement Bay, Tacoma's harbor. The distinctive rectangular tower dates from 1934 and, while missing its lantern, still serves as a navigational aid.

The site includes a keeper's cottage (a vacation rental), a museum and gift shop, a boathouse and an oil house. Now in a Tacoma city park,

the lighthouse can be tricky to find — it's not well marked. The Points Northeast Historical Society restored the keeper's residence, operates the rental and conducts tours on Saturdays March through November.

Serving as keepers, of course, we know New Dungeness best. It's one of the oldest lighthouses on the West Coast, dating from 1857. The 1904 head keeper's dwelling provides modern

accommodations for up to seven. Its relative isolation offers peace and quiet amidst a wildlife refuge full of aquatic birds and bald eagles. Conducting tours and performing maintenance chores is a unique opportunity to allow us to make a small contribution to the lighthouse's preservation.

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The 1903 keeper's cottage at Tacoma's Browns Point Light Station has been restored and updated with modern amenities.

been looked after. We marvel at the ingenuity and dedication of the volunteer organization that has kept it going since the Coast Guard pulled its last keeper 20 years ago. And we are grateful for that serendipitous conversation with fellow RVers who were so enthusiastic about their just-completed week at New Dungeness. They planted a seed that sprouted into a calling. 🗣️



▲ Fidalgo Bay Resort

Where to Camp

Fidalgo Bay Resort, Anacortes

Pull-through and back-in sites provide 30- and 50-amp service and free Wi-Fi; water-view sites are available at additional cost. Amenities include restrooms, showers, a laundry room, RV supplies and a rec room. A public walking trail through the park ends in town. 360-293-5353, www.fidalgobay.com

Maple Grove RV Resort, Everett

Conveniently located, Maple Grove provides 87 back-in and pull-through sites with 30- and 50-amp service, cable, Wi-Fi, a laundry room, restrooms, showers, LP-gas and RV supplies. 866-793-2200 www.maplegroverv.com

Lakeside RV Park, Everett

Lakeside has 70 RV sites, both pull-through and back-in, a small lake, 30- and 50-amp service, cable, Wi-Fi, restrooms, showers, a laundry room, a playground, horseshoes, RV supplies and LP-gas. 800-468-7275, www.lakesidervpark.net

Rainbow's End RV Park, Sequim

Small and friendly, Rainbow's End offers pull-through and back-in sites with 30- and 50-amp service, free Wi-Fi, picnic tables, restrooms, showers, a laundry room and a recreation hall. 360-683-3863 www.rainbowsendrvpark.com

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GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS

On the border of North Carolina and Tennessee, small towns charm visitors, rivers and streams converge, and ridge after ridge of forested landscape drape ancient mountains in America's most visited national park

article and photos by **Al Swanson**

"There are trees here that stood before our forefathers ever came to this continent; there are brooks that still run as clear as on the day the first pioneer cupped his hand and drank from them. In this park, we shall conserve these trees, the pine, the redbud, the dogwood, the azalea, the rhododendron, the trout and the thrush for the happiness of the American people."

— **President Franklin D. Roosevelt**



One of the most mesmerizing and naturally beautiful areas of this country lies on the border between North Carolina and Tennessee. I have had the privilege of visiting the Great Smoky Mountains on two occasions and have been fascinated with my findings each time. The Smokies have a rich history, which includes occupation by Native Americans and later settlement by immigrant populations from northern Europe.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park was created in 1934 to preserve the land and rich forest areas for generations. It is into this beautiful setting that tourists numbering up to 9 million a year come to enjoy nature's bounty. Just outside the park in Tennessee are three small cities — Sevierville, Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg — that offer a multitude of attractions for visitors and no shortage of RV parks.

Unlike most national parks, entrance to Great Smoky Mountains National Park is free. The easiest way to get around is by vehicle, and many accessible roads bring visitors to almost every corner of the park's nearly 522,000 acres. Elevations range from 870 feet to well over 6,500 feet, giving hikers ample op-

portunity to test their skills.

Waterfalls abound, and seven major ones are relatively easy to get to from their respective trailheads. Distances range from cascades that can be seen from the road, such as Meigs Falls, to Abrams Falls, a moderate 5-mile round-trip hike from the trailhead in Cades Cove. More information on this and other hikes can be obtained from visitor centers in the park. One good source is the free What-To-Do guide that is widely available at park information centers.

Here, however, let's concentrate on three driving tours that get a great deal of attention and use. The first is Newfound Gap Road, which bisects the park almost in half from northwest to southeast. This is a beautiful though curvy trail with many pullouts that allow visitors to view the majestic rolling hills and valleys of the Great Smokies. This road brings visitors from Tennessee over the top to the North Carolina side of the park.

At the top of Newfound Gap is a large parking area that crosses the Appalachian Trail, which passes through most of the national park. From this point hikers can climb to Clingmans Dome, the highest



(Above) One of many small streams that inundate the Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail. The entrance to the trail is just a short distance past the parking areas for Rainbow Falls.



Did You Know?
Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the ideal habitat for more than 1,600 species of flowering plants and trees. Bears occur in greater concentration than anywhere else in North America, and the park is known for its 30 species of salamanders.

point in the park at just over 6,600 feet. Newfound Gap is also the border between Tennessee and North Carolina. Visitors can continue on their route to the Mountain Farm Museum and Mingus Mill, a collection of historic log buildings, and the park's southeast entrance in North Carolina. Views from this road are spectacular, and when the weather is right, you can see the fog-filled canyons that give the Smoky Mountains their name. In fall the colors of the hardwoods make this trail a dramatic drive.

A second well-traveled driving route is the Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail. In summer this beautiful roadway passes through some of the lushest hardwood forests anywhere. The trail is a very popular attraction, so driving it with a large vehicle is not recommended. Parking in many of the pullouts becomes a real problem during peak season, so it's advised that travelers take the trail early in the day.

The trail is a one-way loop that begins and ends just outside the town of Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Many hiking trails spur off from it, as do several restored homesteads that visitors can easily walk to. Be sure to stop at some of them to relive the environment of this area 150 years ago. Abundant wildflowers pop up in late spring and summer, and bubbling mountain streams echo through the forest.

(Below from left) Wildlife abounds, including deer, black bear, coyote, ground hogs and turkey. Cades Cove is a very popular one-way drive through beautiful scenic parkland. Campsites at River Plantation RV Resort in Sevierville, Tennessee, offer a peaceful, natural environment.



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The route is closed in winter.

Lastly, the 11-mile Cades Cove Loop offers yet another enchanting drive, accessible via Laurel Creek Road at the north end of the park. This is another extremely popular drive, especially in autumn when the leaves turn. This area was settled by Europeans in the early 19th century, and many structures from that era have been maintained by the National Park Service.

The Cades Cove Loop is a one-way road that passes 19 tour stops marked for self-guided tours. In addition to the beautiful scenery, live demonstrations are held in the warmer months to show visitors how early settlers made molasses, soap and apple butter.

Along the loop, wildlife sightings are common, and on our drive we saw several turkey, deer and even black bear. In addition to picturesque hardwood landscapes, we also beheld beautiful pastures with rugged



mountain backgrounds. It's a real haven for photographers.

Access to the park is easy from either the Tennessee or North Carolina side. The Tennessee towns of Gatlinburg, Sevierville and Pigeon Forge offer an immense variety of at-

tractions that shouldn't be missed. Amusements of all sorts can be found throughout the region, from go-kart racing and miniature golf to wax museums and playhouses. There's no shortage of entertainment with several theaters providing

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country-western productions as well as many dinner-theater shows. A wide variety of restaurants suits all tastes, and wineries have sprung up as well. If golf is your forte, eight golf courses await, and shopping, too, is available in abundance, including

outlet malls and retail shops. A variety of events are scheduled throughout the peak season and include barbecue cookoffs, music festivals and Oktoberfest celebrations.

Traffic can be a problem, especially on weekends, and vacationing

(Above from far left) One of the many dinner theaters available for entertainment in Sevierville. A view of Gatlinburg, Tennessee, where you can do it all — from ziplining to hiking to fishing. The Hollywood Wax Museum in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, is the country's largest and houses uncanny replicas of some of the most famous people in show business.

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families are everywhere. The plus side of this is that there are simply tons of things to see and do. The downside is that the variety of entertainment draws crowds, so expect congestion throughout the peak summer months.

One feature of this region that should be emphasized is local crafts. Just outside Gatlinburg is a large arts-and-craft community along an 8-mile-loop that houses many shops and workshops. To get there, turn on East Parkway at the third light in Gatlinburg and continue on to Glades Road. Take a left and follow the loop all the way around to find some very interesting crafts. Numerous ceramics shops along the way sell every form of pottery and offer demonstrations. There are also broom makers, jewelry makers, glassblowers and chair makers. The shopkeepers are friendly and very much interested in discussing their merchandise and how it's made. I was particularly fascinated with the pottery works and one shop that contained a variety of wood products from chairs to wooden fruit.

RVers are welcome, as evidenced by the number and quality of RV resorts and campgrounds. We stayed at River Plantation RV Resort in Sevierville and were pleased by the accommodations. The roads are paved and the sites good-sized, and we were fortunate to get a well-shaded site on the Pigeon River. The resort sits between Sevierville and Pigeon Forge and has full RV accommodations, a nice swimming pool and even a convention center for groups. From the resort there's

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Camping in the Great Smokies

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RV PARKS AND RESORTS

Communities surrounding Great Smoky Mountains National Park have no shortage of private RV parks, particularly on the Tennessee side.

Creekside RV Park

Pigeon Forge, Tennessee
800-498-4801
www.creeksidervpark.com

River Plantation RV Resort

Sevierville, Tennessee
800-758-5267
www.rvcoutdoors.com

Twin Creek RV Resort

Gatlinburg, Tennessee
800-252-8077
www.twincreekrvresort.com

Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park Camp-Resorts

Cherokee, North Carolina
877-716-6711
www.jellystonecherokee.com

easy access to attractions, restaurants and entertainment. Reservations are recommended well in advance at all of the RV parks in the area.

While I've mentioned the sites that can be seen from driving tours, don't discount the many hiking opportunities. Some 800 miles of forested

trails crisscross the park. Several visitor centers offer good supplies of resources to help travelers decide how to spend their time.

The Great Smokies are truly an area of enchantment — no wonder this beautiful national park is the most visited in the country. 🚐

Mountaintops are often cloaked in fog, supporting the name "Smoky Mountains."

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THE AMANA COLONIES

Lush farmland, historic architecture, unique shops and German-American cuisine make these seven captivating villages on the Iowa prairie an adventuresome escape back in time

article by Elisabeth Daniels



Jogging down a quiet sidewalk in east-central Iowa, I could see 6-foot-tall rows of corn in the fields ahead, gleaming with golden light as the sun was setting. Streaks of purple and orange filled the sky, and the scent of fresh-mowed grass floated on the evening breeze. In that moment, it was easy to understand why German-speaking Europeans known as the Community of True Inspiration

settled the Amana Colonies in the mid-1800s.

An RV rally brought me, my husband, two dogs and one cat to the Amana Colonies. With a large, well-groomed campground and an on-site events center, it was the perfect place for a rally. Throw in seven charming Old World villages to explore in close proximity, and it's no surprise that more than a million visitors are drawn to this national historic landmark each year.



(Above) After shopping at the Kitchen Sink, relax in the courtyard with a glass of wine from White Cross Cellars. (Right) Everywhere you look in the colonies, pastoral views abound.



PHOTOS BY ELISABETH DANIELS AND COURTESY AMANA COLONIES CVB

A HISTORY LESSON

The Inspirationists' journey to Iowa began in Germany in 1714 with the advent of a religious movement based on the gift of inspiration. As the movement grew, those who believed in this gift were persecuted for their faith. They fled to the freedom of America in 1843, first forming an enclave in New York and then expanding to Iowa where they could buy farmland at a reasonable price. With fertile soil and the abundance of stone, wood and water, Iowa had everything they needed to build their new community.

Seven villages were established just a mile or two apart in a rich river valley. Together they formed the

Amana Colonies. The Inspirationists believed in communal living, so property and resources were shared. Residents had all of their needs taken care of — housing, education, health care and meals provided at more than 50 communal kitchens. In return, men and women were assigned jobs within the community. Although no one received a wage, income from farming, wool and calico production, clock making and brewing supported the colonies. Top-notch workmanship became an Amana hallmark and remains so today, a testament to the biblical term “amana,” interpreted by the colony’s founders to mean “remain true.”

Getting There

From Interstate 80, take Exit 225, turning north on Highway 151. Travel 5 miles until you reach the intersection of highways 151 and 6. Turn left on Highway 6 to go to South Amana, West Amana and High Amana. Turn right to go to Homestead, Amana, Middle Amana and East Amana.



ESCAPE TO ANOTHER TIME

The Great Depression ended the communal way of living, but the houses and other elements of the lifestyle were well preserved — enough so that the Amana Colonies were added to the National Register of Historic Places. The communal kitchens are now restaurants, and high-quality handicrafts are still made in the area. Approximately 1,700 people live in the colonies today, and nearly half the locals are descendants of the original German colonists.

Although they no longer attend 11 religious services a week, men and women still enter the churches through distinct doorways and sit in separate pews. Singing is done a cappella, without musical accompaniment. Each village has its own church in the center of town, but don't look for stained-glass or steeples. There are no elements that identify the buildings as churches.

We learned all this on a guided walking tour of Amana, the largest of the colonies. The tour left from the visitor center, a restored corncrib, and, while waiting for our guide, we browsed through maps, restaurant menus and brochures for area businesses.

The 1-mile stroll, worth every bit of the \$7-per-person charge, took us past buildings dating from the mid- to late-1800s. Many have been converted to commercial spaces, but their exteriors remain intact. The historic clapboard homes are made with rock from area quarries and locally fired brick. Almost all of them have trellises, providing vine support for the grapes used in Amana wines.

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

The Amana Colonies RV Park and Event Center is easy to access off Interstate 80, 20 miles southwest of Cedar Rapids and 17 miles west of Iowa City. It's just minutes from Amana proper and sits on 60 acres near scenic Lily Lake and the Kolonieweg. All of the 136 full-hookup RV sites are grassy, most have a picnic table, and there's plenty of space between rigs. There's even room enough for large groups.

Pets are welcome, and you're free to walk them wherever you'd like as long as you clean up after them. At night, we'd hear cows mooing in the adjacent fields, and our dogs would stop midstride, ears high, heads cocked, fascinated by the noise coming from the dark shadows.

Because the sites and most of the roads are gravel, it can get dusty. There's no cable, but the free Wi-Fi was pretty good when we were there, especially considering how many campers there were during the week of the rally. As far as other amenities, there's a laundry facility on-site, as well as a dump station, and propane is available.

800-471-7616, www.amanarvpark.com



In the late-1800s, the Amana Colonists built a 7-mile-long canal stretching from the Iowa River near West Amana, through Middle Amana, then through Amana. (Right) One of your first stops in the Amana Colonies should be the Amana Heritage Museum.



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THE AMANA COLONIES

PRESENTS FROM THE PAST

Once we knew our way around town, my husband and I visited the Amana Heritage Museum, which is made up of three 19th-century buildings. Don't miss the gardening and wine-making exhibits showcased in the original washhouse/woodshed. After that, you might want to hike or bike along the Millrace, a 7-mile canal that powered the Amana Mill in the 1860s. Or go for a run on the Kolonieweg, or Amana



(Top) Next door to Ackerman Winery, the Heritage Wine, Cheese and Jelly Haus offers more than 30 varieties of domestic and imported cheeses, including *bierkäse*, or beer cheese. (Above middle) Stock up on traditional specialties like farmer-style spätzle egg noodles, a southern German favorite. (Above) There's corn of every variety in the Amana Colonies, including metal stalks for the garden.

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Colonies Recreation Trail, a scenic, paved 3 miles that's commonly known as "colony way."

If you prefer shopping, there are more than 60 one-of-a-kind boutiques in the colonies. Pop in to the Amana Furniture and Clock Shop for handmade tables, chairs and grandfather clocks. The Amana General Store features a year-round Christmas room, along with gift baskets, books about Amana and Milkhouse Creamery candles. We especially enjoyed Kitchen Sink, a kitchen-accessory store. They're known for their huge selection of cookie cutters, supposedly the largest selection anywhere.

EAT AND DRINK LIKE A LOCAL

After being on our feet for a good part of the day, we stopped in at Ackerman Winery for some refreshment. We really liked the black-raspberry wine, but there are also dandelion blossom, mango, cranberry and other exotic fruit wines — even rhubarb, which is claimed to be an Amana favorite. Or sample the tasty brews at the Millstream Brewing Company, Iowa's oldest brewery. Relax on the deck with a pitcher of beer while noshing on locally made ham, bacon, sausage and cheese that you can pick up at the Amana Meat Shop and Smokehouse.

We kicked off most mornings with lattes at Serena's Coffee Café and fueled our afternoons with wedding-cake ice cream — a buttercream base with chunks of vanilla wedding cake and thick swirls of raspberry — from the Chocolate Haus. The handcrafted gourmet chocolates they sell were as blissful as the ice cream.

If you'd rather sit down and be waited on, Amana offers plenty of options, and each one has its specialty. On a Saturday morning, there's nothing better than the Colony Inn's famous family-style breakfast. Come hungry between 7 and 11 a.m. for fried eggs, fruit, Amana sausage, bacon, fried potatoes, English muffins with homemade jam and, best of all, plate-sized German pancakes,

paper thin and supremely crispy. If you're still hungry, feel free to ask for seconds without worrying about the tab — refills are included. For lunch, we enjoyed salads with spaetzle at the Ronneburg. Be sure to request the homemade German dressing, a light and flavorful blend of tomato, oil, vinegar and white zinfandel. After dinner at the Ox Yoke Inn, pick up one of their delicious pies to go.

LET US ENTERTAIN YOU

Dramas, comedies, musicals and kid-friendly shows — the Old Creamery Theatre has it all, and it's located across from the RV park. Plays are performed seasonally, and it's nice to get up close and personal with the actors in the intimate venue.

There are all kinds of other events going on in the colonies, with something exciting happening nearly

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every month. Make plans for Maifest in May, Oktoberfest in October or Winterfest in January. Get a jump on the holidays at Prelude to Christmas, taking place each year in early December. Enjoy candlelit streets, Santa, the Tannenbaum Forest and Christmas shopping.

Music fans can spend Sunday afternoons at the Fireside Winery enjoying light appetizers and live entertainment with the Unplugged music series from March to October. Love art? Take a free self-guided tour through the galleries and artist studios in all of the villages on the third Friday of every month from May through August. Are you wild about wine? Don't miss the Vintner's Dinner, a five-course food-and-wine pairing at the Ox Yoke Inn. Enjoy specially prepared items not normally featured on the menu with White Cross Cellars wine. If golf is your game, book a tee time at the Amana Colonies Golf Course.

We truly enjoyed our trip to the Amana Colonies with its spacious campground, historic buildings, excellent restaurants, distinctive shops, enlightening museums and loads of exciting activities. 📍

TRAVEL INFORMATION

Amana Colonies Visitors Center
800-579-2294
www.amanacolonies.com

Amana Heritage Museum
Open daily, April 1 through October 1; open Saturdays only, March, November and December.
319-622-3567
www.amanaheritage.org

Kolonieweg
Amana Colonies Recreation Trail
319-622-3965
www.amanacoloniestrails.org

Old Creamery Theatre
319-622-6262
www.oldcreamery.com

Ox Yoke Inn
800-233-3441, www.oxyokeinn.com

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ADVENTURES IN HISTORY

Hit the road to celebrate America's colorful past — from Gettysburg to the Oregon Trail

Whether you have kids in tow or are looking for an enriching experience on your next RV trip, why not celebrate American history? We've handpicked 11 historical hot spots that represent our beloved national symbols and have welcoming RV parks in the region. Be sure to inquire before you go, as many businesses have seasonal hours and some RV parks close for the winter.

ALABAMA

From the Civil War to civil rights, Montgomery is rich in history. If you're a Civil War buff, you'll want to check out the state capitol — the first capitol of the Confederacy — and the first White House of the Confederacy, which was the home of Jefferson Davis. For sites commemorating civil rights, visit the bus stop where Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in 1955, sparking the

famous Montgomery bus boycott and the start of the civil rights movement, as well as Troy University's Rosa Parks Museum.

Other not-to-be-missed sites include the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, where Martin Luther King and others organized the Montgomery bus boycott, and the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, which traces the route of the famous 54-mile march, which



First White House of the Confederacy, Montgomery, Alabama

led President Lyndon Johnson to present a bill that would become the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Capital City RV Park (open year-round)
877-271-8026, www.capitalcityrvpark.net

Kountry Air RV Park (open year-round)
334-365-6861, www.kountryairrv.com

Montgomery South RV Park (open year-round)
334-220-1175, www.montgomerysouthrvpark.com

ARIZONA

Enjoy both history and one of the world's natural wonders in Arizona when visiting Flagstaff and the Grand Canyon. At Grand Canyon National Park, a unique history find is the architecture of Mary Coulter, the first female architect hired by the National Park Service. Coulter's eight Grand Canyon projects

Iconic Mount Rushmore National Memorial stands in the Black Hills of South Dakota and welcomes more than 3 million visitors each year.



PHOTO BY DEAN FRANKLIN AND (TOP) MONTGOMERY CVB

San Diego skyline from Point Loma's Cabrillo National Monument



PHOTO BY JAMES BLANK



PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

include Hopi House and Desert View Watchtower, both on the South Rim.

Enjoy getting your kicks on Route 66 in historic Flagstaff by checking out the preserved historical buildings and sites in Santa Fe Plaza, such as an old steam engine and the 1897 depot. Indulge in classic Americana grub with a bite at Granny's Closet, originally built as the Paul Bunyan Café. Or step into the past at the Galaxy Diner where you can enjoy your meal while listening to '50s music from the jukebox.

Also well worth a visit, Wupatki National Monument in Flagstaff and Montezuma Castle National Monument, 50 miles to the south, were both home to prehistoric Anasazi and Sinagua Native American farmers and traders.

Black Barts RV Park (open year-round)
928-774-1912, www.blackbartssteakhouse.com

Flagstaff KOA (open year-round)
928-526-9926
www.koa.com/campgrounds/flagstaff

Woody Mountain Campground and RV Park
(open April 1 to October 31)
928-774-7727
www.woodymountaincampground.com

CALIFORNIA

If you're headed west, we recommend visiting San Diego, the Golden State's birthplace and a popular spring break hot spot. Beyond the city's numerous tourist activities — from the famed zoo to Sea World and the Safari Park — be sure to get a taste for California history by visiting sites like Cabrillo National Monument, one of America's most visited national monuments with more than 800,000 annual visitors. San Diego County's only national park, it commemorates the discovery more than 472 years ago of what is now the West Coast of the United States. Explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo led the first European expedition of the West Coast, anchoring his flagship San Salvador on San Diego's Point Loma — the Plymouth Rock of the West — on September 28, 1542.

San Diego's rich maritime heritage continues today with a prominent U.S. Navy presence, including the USS Midway Museum, where visitors can board one of America's longest-serving aircraft carriers. San Diego Bay is also known for cruise ships, sport fishing, and recreational sailing and boating, and is one of America's most beautiful

natural harbors. You can also find a new life-size, fully functioning replica of Cabrillo's 16th-century galleon ship, the *San Salvador*, at San Salvador Village at Spanish Landing, near downtown on San Diego Bay.

Mission Bay RV Resort (open year-round)
877-219-6900, www.missionbayrvresort.com

Pinezanita RV Park and Campgrounds
(open year-round)
760-765-0429, www.pinezanita.com

The Springs at Borrego RV Resort
(open year-round)
866-330-0003, www.springsatborrego.com

IDAHO

For historical treasures in the West, don't miss the 2,000-mile Oregon National Historic Trail. Hitch up your trailer, like the pioneers did with their wagons, and head to Idaho to visit Montpelier and the National Oregon/California Trail Center. You'll also find



PHOTO BY PEG OWENS

Soda Springs (home to the world's only captive geyser), Enders Hotel and Museum (said to be haunted), the Wagon Box Grave (a family of seven is buried beneath the cemetery's first gravestone) and Lava Hot Springs, a city on the old trail route that has become a popular resort location for its many public hot springs.

In American Falls, be sure to visit Massacre Rocks State Park and Register Rock, a huge boulder that holds the names and dates of Oregon Trail emigrants (some written with axle grease) as they passed through. While in the area heading farther west, stop at Three Island Crossing State Park in Glens Ferry, a major Snake River crossing site for pioneers, where you can visit the Oregon Trail History and Education Center to learn more about the region's early settlers and Native Americans.

Cowboy RV Park (open year-round)
208-232-4587
www.cowboyrvbelairemobilehomepark.com

Lava Hot Springs KOA (open April 1 to October 31)
208-776-5295
www.koa.com/campgrounds/lava-hot-springs

Montpelier Creek KOA
(open April 1 to October 31)
208-847-0863
www.koa.com/campgrounds/montpelier-creek

ILLINOIS

Abraham Lincoln called Springfield home for 17 years, and that's reason enough to justify a Midwest stop. Springfield is the site of the only home Lincoln ever owned, now the Lincoln

Home National Historic Site. The Greek Revival house has been restored to its appearance when Lincoln was elected 16th president and is set in a neighborhood that transports visitors to the heart of the city that Lincoln knew as a father, husband, neighbor and politician.

The city has numerous sites and attractions that provide a picture of Lincoln's life and legacy, including Lincoln's New Salem (a restored pioneer village approximately 20 miles northwest of Springfield), the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, the Lincoln Tomb and the Old State Capitol State Historic Site, where Lincoln gave his famous "House Divided" speech. Other sites in Springfield include Frank Lloyd Wright's Dana-Thomas House, the home of poet Vachel Lindsay, the Elijah Iles House (the oldest house in Springfield), the Illinois State Museum and the Illinois State Military Museum.

Springfield is also a stop along Route 66 and is home to the Cozy Dog Drive In, where the first hot dog on a stick was served, along with several other Route 66 restaurants and the Route 66 Twin Drive-In.

Double J Campground and RV Park
(open year-round)
217-483-9998, www.doublejcampground.com

Illinois State Fair Campgrounds
(open April 1 to October 31)
217-524-9894, www.visitspringfieldillinois.com

Lincoln's New Salem Campground
(open year-round)
217-632-4000
www.lincolnewsalem.com/camping.html



History comes alive at Springfield, Illinois' Lincoln Home National Historic Site.

PHOTO COURTESY SPRINGFIELD CVB

KENTUCKY

For a quintessential part of American automobile history and a favorite among sports-car enthusiasts, visit Bowling Green. The city is the birthplace of America's renowned sports car, the Corvette. See the only place in the world where Corvettes are made — the GM Bowling Green Assembly Plant, where weekday tours are offered.

The National Corvette Museum is across the street. Beyond seeing rare memorabilia and more than 70 Vettes on display, visitors can view the giant sinkhole that devoured eight classic cars last year. Three of the vehicles are now being restored, and the remaining five cars are on display in their mangled state.

Be sure to stop by the newly opened NCM Motorsports Park, a high-performance driving facility and racetrack for drivers of all skill levels.

Beech Bend Park Campgrounds (open year-round)
270-781-7634, www.beechbend.com

Bowling Green KOA (open year-round)
270-843-1919
www.koa.com/campgrounds/bowling-green

PHOTO COURTESY CAMPGROUNDS OF AMERICA



Yellowstone KOA Mountainside, Montana

MASSACHUSETTS

To truly commemorate American history, make time to swing up to New England and visit Provincetown. Located at the very tip of Cape Cod, it was the first landing spot of the *Mayflower* Pilgrims in November 1620. Be sure to seek out the Pilgrim Monument, a 252-foot granite bell tower modeled after the larger Torre del Mangia in Siena, Italy, and the tallest all-granite structure in the United States. The area is also a hot spot for whale watching. Visitors can take naturalist-narrated boat tours to Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, about 10 miles from Provincetown, to observe the ocean-dwelling mammals breaching, feeding and teaching their young how to survive.

Also in Massachusetts and worth a visit is Plymouth, where you can see Plymouth Rock and seek out historical treasures at the Pilgrim Hall Museum, the oldest continuously operating museum in the country, containing

original articles that came over on the *Mayflower*. Other attractions include Plymouth Plantation, a 17th-century English village complete with costumed role-playing colonial interpreters, and Wampanoag Homesite, with a Native American staff and a reproduction 1626 gristmill.

Atlantic Oaks (open year-round)
508-255-1437, www.atlanticoaks.com

Boston/Cape Cod KOA
(open March 15 to November 15)
508-947-6435, www.bostoncapecodkoa.com

Dunes' Edge Campground
(open mid-May to mid-October)
508-487-9815, www.thetrustees.org/places-to-visit/places-to-stay/dunes-edge-campground

Pinewood Lodge Campground
(open May 1 to October 30)
508-746-3548, www.pinewoodlodge.com

MONTANA

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Plymouth Plantation's full-scale replica, the *Mayflower II*

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first national park — Yellowstone in Wyoming, Montana and Idaho — still captivates visitors today. The town of West Yellowstone, Montana, was founded in 1908 specifically to accom-

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ADVENTURES IN HISTORY

modate visitors enjoying this natural wonderland of geothermal geysers, including Old Faithful, as well as fishing, hiking and boating on glassy waters. Stop by Yellowstone Historic Center to learn about the history of this park that has seen millions of visitors over the past hundred years. The center features exhibits that tell how people have journeyed to and through the region since its founding and has a 10-acre district that surrounds the Union Pacific Railroad depot.

For a self-guided stroll, pick up a historic walking tour map at the West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce and enjoy the town's vibrant past. A guided hike into the park can be taken through Wildland Trekking Company.

Buffalo Crossing RV Park

(open May 11 to October 18)

406-646-4300, www.buffalocrossingrvpark.com

Yellowstone Grizzly RV Park

(open May 1 to October 15)

406-646-4466, www.grizzlyrv.com

Yellowstone Park/Mountainside KOA

(open May 15 to October 15)

406-646-7662

www.koa.com/campgrounds/mountainside

Fort Stevens, Oregon



OREGON

Established at the mouth of the Columbia River, Astoria was a key area in the expansion of the American West, with settlers filtering in from the Oregon Trail. To enjoy the region's history, visit Fort Stevens, an 1863 to 1947 military reservation built at the end of the Civil War. Or trek to the Fort Clatsop Visitor Center at Lewis and Clark National Historic Park to see where the Corps of Discovery spent the winter of 1805.

For more recent history, visit 368

38th Street, the home where the '80s classic movie *The Goonies* was filmed.

Astoria/Warrenton/Seaside KOA

(open year-round)

503-861-2606

www.koa.com/campgrounds/astoria

Bud's RV Park

(open year-round)

800-730-6855, www.budsvr.com

Circle Creek RV Resort

(open April 1 to November 1)

503-738-6070, www.circlecreekrv.com

Segway tour of Gettysburg



PENNSYLVANIA

Gettysburg battlefield is one of America's most historic sites. With 6,000 acres of preserved hallowed ground, as well as a variety of ways to tour it (bicycle, horseback, car, RV, bus, Segway), the national military park offers visitors many ways to learn about Gettysburg's pivotal Civil War history, pay their respects and reflect on their own lives.

The town of Gettysburg provides a rich opportunity to learn about soldiers and military tactics. The area also pays homage to Abraham Lincoln and his famed Gettysburg Address. Visitors can retrace Lincoln's footsteps as he made his short but memorable visit to this war-ravaged town. Beyond the area's historical significance, Gettysburg offers interesting local culture, from culinary experiences to entertainment, art and events.

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Gettysburg Campground

(open March 27 to late-November 1)

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Mammoth Site of Hot Springs

SOUTH DAKOTA

Visit South Dakota not only for Mount Rushmore but for destinations steeped in the experience of the pioneers in the Midwest. Get a feel for what life was like in the 1800s when visiting De Smet's Ingalls Homestead, where Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote many of her Little House stories. Enjoy a covered-wagon ride and partake in an interactive 1880s school session and pioneering activities, like making rope and corncob dolls.

Another recommended stop is 1880 Town, 22 miles west of Murdo. This popular destination has more than 30 structures fashioned after buildings from 1880 to 1920 and authentically furnished. Other fun features to explore include an exhibit from world champion rodeo cowboy Casey Tibbs, props from the film *Dances with Wolves* and interactive activities for kids.

About 40 miles northwest of Rapid City is Deadwood, a national historic landmark that offers the experience of a Wild West town with a boisterous past. An hour south of Rapid City, Mammoth Site of Hot Springs showcases woolly mammoth remains and more from South Dakota's greatest fossil find.

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www.ingallshomestead.com/camping.html

Rafter J Bar Ranch RV Park

(open May 1 to October 1)
605-574-2527, www.rafterj.com

Whistler Gulch RV Park and Campground

(open May 1 to September 30)
800-704-7139, www.whistlergulch.com

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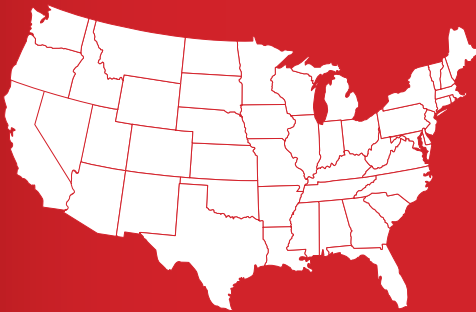
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The Great Pretender

Keystone's Cougar XLite 30RLI looks like a travel trailer but lives like a fifth-wheel

Among the many reasons RVers prefer fifth-wheel trailers, the floorplan ranks near the top. The large opposing slides make for a comfortable, spacious living area, and the kitchen, typically equipped with an abundance of countertop space and even an island in some models, makes a great venue for entertaining guests. Many enthusiasts would prefer to own a fifth-wheel for these attributes but can't justify purchasing one due to the extra cost and the fact that a larger, heavier-duty truck and extra equipment will likely be required to tow it. However, many manufacturers offer lighter-weight travel trailers with floorplans designed to mimic the classic fifth-wheel layout, and the Keystone Cougar XLite 30RLI is one of them. Though it measures 36 feet from end to end, it has a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of just 9,500 pounds, making it towable by most newer half-ton pickups.

Obviously, packing fifth-wheel features into a trailer this large and keeping the weight less than 10,000 pounds isn't an easy task, especially when you consider weight-saving efforts must be cleverly concealed to retain an upscale appearance. Keystone has done a good job in this regard, incorporating

the typical hallmarks of a fifth-wheel floorplan with very little required in the way of compromise. For example, one of the heaviest components a manufacturer can put in an RV are stone or solid-surface countertops, so the Cougar uses laminate counters that look like stone. The microwave and living room television are also smaller than what you'll find in most fifth-wheels, but these are about the only obvious concessions to weight you're likely to notice in this trailer.

Something else you may miss is the abundance of front storage typical in a fifth-wheel, but the Cougar does offer pass-through storage up front that is well lighted and well finished. The trailer had no trouble accommodating the essentials for our test, and, indeed, should be big enough for most with careful packing. We were also pleased to find that Keystone placed the trailer's on/off power switch on the street side, as well as the switches for the front/rear power stabilizing jacks. This thoughtful detail, combined with the standard power A-frame jack and docking lights, makes setting up at the campsite quick and easy, day or night. If additional storage space is needed, there is also a smaller carpeted compartment on the street side.

The living area slideouts are large and deep, meaning that you can't access anything but the bathroom and part of the bedroom during travel. Thankfully, the control panel for the slideouts, tank monitor, etc. is right inside the entry door. We were a bit dismayed, however, to find that the back of the curbside slideout was roughly finished with exposed staples and wood; granted, you can't see this when the slides are deployed, but it's not pleasant to look at as you enter the trailer. A few extra minutes to finish this area would be a great improvement to the overall impression of build quality.

In general, the interior of the Cougar looks good, with glazed walnut raised-panel cabinets, faux-wood-plank vinyl flooring and Ultraleather/cloth furniture in contrasting shades. The rear sofa is well padded and supportive, and converts into a surprisingly comfortable trifold bed that is easy to deploy and stow. We appreciated the large built-in end tables, which have deep cubbies in them. Above the couch are three cabinets that, unlike many fifth-wheels we've tested, are easily reachable by someone in the 5-foot-tall range.

On the curb side, dual cloth recliners fit well into the space, and although there isn't a handle to deploy the footrest, the recliners are light enough to easily pull away from the wall, at which point you just push with your arms and back to deploy the footrest. The seats are well padded and very comfortable,



(Above) The kitchen area is well configured with an abundance of countertop space and a large double-bowl stainless-steel sink. (Right) The bathroom is roomy with a corner shower and a huge linen closet, plus a lavatory with generous under-sink storage.

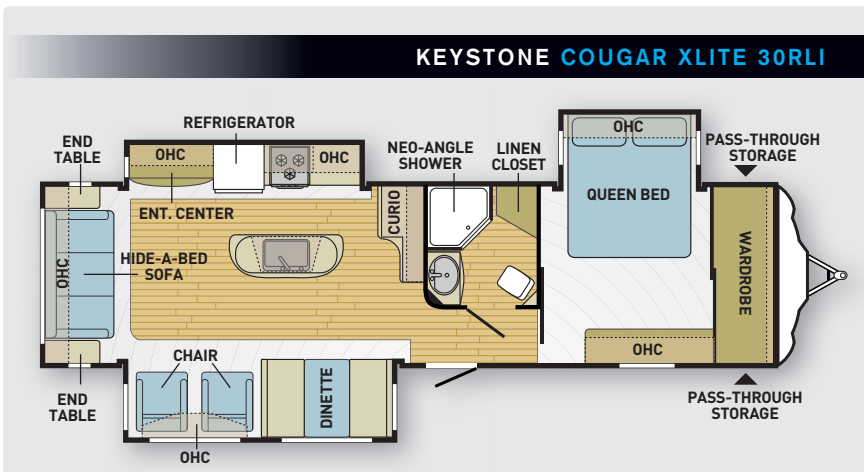


but felt a little rickety in some areas. We understand that weight is a concern in a unit like this, and if the chairs were more robust, they would be heavier and harder to move, but it would be nice if they felt a little bit stronger.

In contrast to most fifth-wheels, the 30RLI has a booth dinette, which we tend to prefer for a few reasons. One, it turns into another bed, which a free-standing dinette cannot. Two, you don't have the problem of the outer chairs' legs falling off the lip on the edge of the slideout. And three, there's an opportunity for storage drawers underneath the seats, which Keystone took advantage

of. The dinette offers enough room for four slender adults, and the spring-loaded "pop-up" dinette table allows you to easily lower and raise the table for sleeping/eating. However, there is a cross member underneath that will meet the knees of taller diners and another cross member on the floor that at least one foot will have to rest on or butt up against. If you're shorter than 6 feet, this shouldn't be a concern; we were able to gain knee clearance by sitting upright, which wasn't terribly comfortable but bearable for the limited amount of time we spent here.

Directly across from the recliners in the opposing slide is a 32-inch Legend flatscreen television, optional Graystone electric fireplace and controls for the audio system, which offers Bluetooth compatibility, a DVD and CD player, AM/





Chevrolet Silverado High Country

Handling the towing duties on this month's test was a Ruby Red Chevy Silverado High Country equipped with the optional Duramax diesel engine and Allison automatic transmission. Admittedly, this was more tow vehicle than required to tow a trailer with a GVWR of 9,500 pounds, but the truck's standard trailer tow rating is 13,000 pounds, which actually is a good margin of capacity when towing.

Today's trucks are becoming increasingly content rich, and the High Country trim level represents the pinnacle of luxury features, doodads and gizmos available in a contemporary pickup. In addition to niceties like heated/cooled leather seats and power everything, the High Country comes with dual-zone climate control, a tilt and telescoping steering wheel, a rear-vision camera, front and rear park assist, the Chevrolet MyLink audio system with an 8-inch color touch screen and navigation, and much more.

Mechanically speaking, the High Country comes standard with a gasoline-burning 6.0-liter V-8, six-speed automatic transmission, an auto-locking rear differential with 4.10:1 gearing, the trailering equipment package, integrated trailer brake controller and a 150-amp alternator, all of which would qualify this truck as a loaded model. But wait, there's more. When you tick the Duramax/Allison option box, you also get the Duramax Plus Package, which, in total, is a hefty \$9,115 option. For this, in addition to the robust drivetrain, you get power-adjustable pedals, a heated steering wheel and electronic nannies like lane-departure warning, forward-collision alert and a safety-alert seat that vibrates alarmingly when your electronic copilot has determined (sometimes without reason) that you've violated a safety parameter. The truck also was equipped with a rear-seat entertainment center with wireless headphones, a power sunroof and excellent heated trailering mirrors with integrated turn signals and a power-folding feature. Option cost was \$11,835, bringing the total cost of the truck to a staggering \$66,095.

Is it worth it? That depends. We liked the seats and the leather-wrapped steering wheel, and the fit and finish in the cabin were exceptional. The truck feels very solid, and even the Duramax engine's presence was subdued, amounting to a distant thrum. Needless to say, it had no trouble towing the test trailer, and we have little doubt that the truck's heavier suspension and long wheelbase contributed to a stable and effortless towing experience. It is a very competent, comfortable truck (even when driving solo), but we question GM's decision to lump a lot of features in with the already expensive diesel option. The High Country with the standard 6.0-liter gas engine saves nearly \$10,000, which may be a practical choice when planning on towing a travel trailer or a midsize fifth-wheel.

FM stereo, aux/USB ports, and A, B, C speaker selection that allows you to choose front, rear or outside speakers, or all of the above. The sound from the system is decent, but the outside speakers sounded weak compared to the interior speakers, and we wish they were flush-mount instead of housed in bulky enclosures. Also, the audio system works on 12-volt DC power, but the television does not, and the mounting execution leaves something to be desired. On one hand, the TV is mounted on an arm that extends and swivels for easier viewing if you're sitting someplace other than the recliners directly across from it. On the other, the connections for the cable and 120-volt AC power are on the wall next to it, not behind it, so you have ugly wires hanging underneath and another wire running from the bottom of the TV through the counter, presumably to a connection behind the audio system.

The kitchen offers an 8-cubic-foot Dometic refrigerator with a raised panel wood front, a stainless Atwood three-burner range with no cover, an overhead hood, a standard oven and a tiny stainless High Pointe microwave above the counter. There is an abundance of countertop space next to the stove, although you'll likely use this to place prepped items, since the slideout is too short to allow prep here unless you duck under it (or you're no taller than about 5 feet 5 inches). However, there is plenty of prep space on the forward hutch (not to mention a handy charging station for your electronic devices) and the kitchen island, which also features a stainless-steel dual-bowl sink. There is a ton of



(Top) The living area features a rear Ultraleather sleeper sofa and the entertainment center with fireplace and a 32-inch flatscreen TV. **(Above)** The booth dinette and two fabric-upholstered recliners provide comfortable seating. Bowed roof rafters and LED lighting promote a light and airy feel.



SPECIFICATIONS

KEYSTONE COUGAR XLITE 30RLI

Exterior Length	36'
Exterior Width	8'
Exterior Height	11' 4"
Interior Width	7' 8"
Interior Height	6' 11"
Construction	Aluminum-frame, laminated roof and walls; laminated TPO roof with steel trusses
Freshwater Cap.	43 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	56 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	28 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	8 cubic foot
Furnace	25,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	15,000 Btu
Converter	55 amp
Battery	Dealer supplied
Tires	ST225/75 R15
Suspension	Leaf-spring
Weight (water and propane full, no supplies)	8,200 lbs.
Hitch Weight	920 lbs.
Axle Weight	7,280 lbs.
GVWR	9,500 lbs.
GAWR (2)	4,400 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	1,300 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$41,962
MSRP, as tested	\$45,705
Basic Warranty	12-month limited, transferable

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At 36 feet, the Cougar XLite 30RLI is a long lightweight, but it is designed to be towed by the current crop of half-ton trucks, most of which can tow 10,000 pounds or more.

storage space, with cabinets above and below the hutch (the ones below are big enough to serve as a pantry), four large drawers underneath the countertop and lots of utility-type storage underneath the sink. A cutout for a trash can here would be nice addition.

There are just a few items in the kitchen area that we'd like to see changed. For example, there is a nice light fixture above the dinette but not above the island; some pendant lights here would be an elegant touch. And, although we appreciate the two 120-volt AC outlets on the island, we wish they were on the kitchen side. Placing them on the dinette side means you have to walk around the island to plug in your appliances, which doesn't make it easy to plug in appliances, but it does keep cords out of the way of the more frequently used traffic pattern. Finally, the curved wall that transitions into the bedroom hall is inexcusably flimsy, flexing even when touching the wall-mounted thermostat. Just a simple strip of 2- x 2-inch wood behind this panel would solve the problem.

One thing that's nice about a fifth-wheel floorplan in a travel trailer is that no steps are required to get to the bed/bath area, so the door to the bath can open and close without having to step

down the stairs or squeeze between the wall and the door. The bathroom is roomy enough, with a large fiberglass shower enclosure, lavatory with lots of storage underneath and a huge corner linen closet. The only thing that's weird is that the closet doesn't quite meet the shower, but the space in between is too small for a broom or vacuum attachment, so we think this will become a haven for dust and dirt over time that can't be cleaned easily. Elsewhere, the bath area features an overhead roof vent, three towel hooks and a porcelain toilet with a foot flush, a nice surprise in a lightweight.

In the bedroom, the queen bed is housed in a deep streetside slideout and offers substantial underbed storage, with the platform supported by gas struts. The bed is very comfortable, and overhead cabinets offer lighting underneath for reading. We just wish that Keystone had taken a little more time finishing the underside of these cabinets, as there were exposed staples to stare up at, and the ones that were covered were still very noticeable. At the foot of the bed is a chest of drawers with four very large drawers and a good-size side cabinet, plus another cabinet overhead. There was no TV in the bedroom, although it is TV-ready

and there is a suggested mounting point for a TV bracket. Overall, the room feels light and bright, thanks to a large window above the counter and windows on either side of the slideout. The mirrored closet also contributes to the feeling of spaciousness and has plenty of room inside for hanging clothes.

It's never easy to get the best of all worlds in an RV, but for fifth-wheel living in a travel trailer that weighs less than 10,000 pounds, the Keystone Cougar XLite 30RLI comes pretty close. 🚐

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Living It Up

The latest trend in fifth-wheels brings the lounge upstairs

Fifth-wheels come in all sizes and a variety of floorplans, but over the years there has generally been a sort of unspoken template for their basic interior footprint. Previously, one could pretty much lay money on the fact that the master bedroom would occupy the raised front section, with the living area situated in the rear. There will always be a few exceptions, but, by and large, this is your classic fifth-wheel layout.

A trend is again emerging, one that turns traditional thinking upside down or at least takes an opposing view: Why not switch things around and build the living room and lounge area at the front

of the trailer, providing a more private bedroom in the rear, a more central bathroom and more overall flexibility when it comes to livability options?

In addition to the always-popular "personal preference," moving the lounge up front has some definite advantages. Perhaps the most obvious is that the front-living-room configuration results in more privacy for overnight guests in the living room. "[Our] lounge has theater seating directly across from the TV for optimal viewing and two additional hide-a-bed sofas," said Dymon Ferrer, general manager of EverGreen's Lifestyle luxury RV division. "When guests

stay over, the hide-a-bed sofa creates one large semiprivate sleeping area in the lounge."

The front-lounge area also offers more versatility for interior storage, kitchen setup and especially entertainment options, as there are now two separate lounge areas instead of one large kitchen/dining room/living room.

"Many people love the 'denlike' setting of the front living room and feel it creates a more residential environment," said Jim Mac, communications director at Keystone RV. This means you can actually hold a civilized conversation in the dining area, as the sports fanatics scream at the referees

Above: Upscale theater seating is a popular configuration in front-lounge fivers, and the Winnebago Destination 37FL offers plenty of comfortable seating, big-screen entertainment and an impressive electric fireplace.

down the hall and up the stairs in front of what's usually an impressive home-theater setup featuring a large flat-screen HDTV with surround sound and plush seating. "We lovingly call the front-lounge portion the Grand Theatre, for obvious reasons," said Marty Friend, Grand Design RV's marketing and communications manager.

Likewise, moving the living room forward means placing the bedroom and lavatory in the back, which leads to more space in two pretty important areas. "With the bedroom and bathroom in the rear, it gives campers more headroom than is common in front-bed-and-bath decks," said Fred Hershberger, general manager of

Coachmen's fifth-wheel division.

Whether for more privacy, a residential theater area, more headroom or just because variety is the spice of life, manufacturers are more than happy to provide customers with even more options by offering front-living-room fifth-wheels. The following are but a few of the models available today.

Coachmen

The front living area in the Brookstone 375FL is built around a 50-inch LED TV featuring "smart" technology. That means the TV utilizes the RV park's Wi-Fi to connect to the Internet and run popular apps like Netflix, Hulu and YouTube. Viewing is even more enjoyable when you're seated in one of the opposing comfy sofa beds or reclining home-theater chair. A fireplace is optional.

Thoughtful appointments such as recessed LED lighting, MCD roller shades throughout and sectionalized drawer dividers in the galley help keep living easy on the inside, while double-laminated side walls and a gel-coat exterior protect the trailer from weathering and road debris. Owners will truly appreciate that each side of the queen bed (a king bed is optional) features a nightstand that contains a 120-volt AC outlet for charging a phone, tablet or other electronic device.

BROOKSTONE 375FL

Exterior Length	39' 6"	LP-gas Cap.	14 gal.
Exterior Width	8'	Hitch Weight	2,400 lbs.
Exterior Height	12' 11"	GVWR	15,500 lbs.
Interior Height	8' 11" main floor / 6' 9" living area	MSRP	\$56,833
Freshwater Cap.	70 gal.	Coachmen RV	
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	45 gal. / 90 gal.	800-353-7383, www.coachmenrv.com	



CrossRoads

The Rushmore Lincoln clearly features a focus on a wide-open, airy atmosphere. The Lincoln boasts what CrossRoads calls an industry-first windshield in the front cap, which offers panoramic views and permits natural light to make the interior appear even larger and more inviting.

The concept is further bolstered by dual slides in the living room, creating an open pathway to the fully equipped galley and the rest of the trailer. Two more slides expand the square footage of the rear bedroom, establishing the feeling of a true "master suite." The full bathroom on the main level includes a full-size fiberglass shower, linen storage, a dual vanity and room for a stackable washer/dryer.

RUSHMORE LINCOLN

Exterior Length	42' 4"	Hitch Weight	2,846 lbs.
Exterior Width	8'	GVWR	16,500 lbs.
Exterior Height	13' 2"	MSRP	\$86,607
Interior Height	9' 6" galley	CrossRoads Recreational Vehicles	
Freshwater Cap.	104 gal.	260-593-2088	
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	42 gal. / 84 gal.	www.crossroadsrv.com	
LP-gas Cap.	14 gal.		





EverGreen

EverGreen RV offers a front lounge in its Bay Hill 379FL that's great for movie night or catching the big game. Dual front slideouts house opposing 80-inch sofa beds, and two theater seats offer perfect views of the big-screen TV above the fireplace.

But the TV isn't all that's big in the Bay Hill: The crowned ceiling in the lounge adds 4½ inches of headroom, making the living room feel bigger than its already impressive space.

The galley features solid-surface countertops and an island, plus there's an option for a residential double-French-door refrigerator with an integrated icemaker. The rear bedroom offers an option for a king-size bed and TV, while a wardrobe, dresser and closets provide plenty of space for your wardrobe. A full-size shower in the lav completes the big feeling of the Bay Hill.



BAY HILL 379FL

Exterior Length	42'
Exterior Width	8' 4"
Exterior Height	13' 1"
Interior Height	8' 6" galley
Freshwater Cap.	70 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	40 gal. / 80 gal.
LP-gas Cap.	14 gal.
Hitch Weight	2,390 lbs.
GVWR	16,070 lbs.
MSRP	\$69,600

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Forest River

The front living room of the Cardinal 3800 from Forest River boasts a large 55-inch LED HDTV in a built-in entertainment center above the electric fireplace, which can be viewed from either of the large, plush opposing trifold sofas.

The bedroom comes standard with a king bed and an impressive flip-up 32-inch TV. The large wardrobe unit in one of the two bedroom slides means packing for extended trips — or even full-timing — is worry-free. The amidships galley offers a good amount of solid-surface prep space, while the freestanding dinette and large pantry offer the versatility of a residential layout. Frameless windows, an aluminum-wrapped LED-lit electric awning, a high-gloss gel-coat exterior and laminated slide-end walls help keep the trailer looking good.



CARDINAL 3800FL

Exterior Length	40' 11"
Exterior Width	8' 5"
Exterior Height	13' 9"
Interior Height	6' 9" living room; 8' 9" galley
Freshwater Cap.	64 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	40 gal. / 80 gal.
LP-gas Cap.	14 gal.
Hitch Weight	2,110 lbs.
GVWR	15,790 lbs.
MSRP	\$84,096

Forest River

574-389-4600, www.forestriverinc.com



Grand Design

The Solitude 379FL is Grand Design's flagship front-lounge fiver. The Grand Theatre in the front living room offers two opposing slides with 80-inch trifold sofas in addition to dual theater seats, all lined up to view the 50-inch LED TV above the cozy electric fireplace. The galley is home to a large kitchen island featuring a built-in curio cabinet and hardwood cabinet doors with hidden hinges.

The 379FL also features a master-bedroom suite with a generous amount of closet space, solid-surface countertops throughout, a large master bath with a glass-bowl sink, aluminum entry steps and a huge pass-through underbelly storage area. Weather-Tex insulation allows four-season comfort, and the trailer also boasts a whole-coach water-filtration system, heated holding tanks and a "travel center" compartment.



SOLITUDE 379FL

Exterior Length	42' 6"
Exterior Width	8' 5"
Exterior Height	12' 11"
Interior Height	6' 6" lounge; 8' 7" galley
Freshwater Cap.	54 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	45 gal. / 90 gal.
LP-gas Cap.	14 gal.
Hitch Weight	3,000 lbs.
GVWR	16,000 lbs.
MSRP	\$63,862

Grand Design Recreational Vehicles

574-825-9679, www.granddesignrv.com



Heartland

The five-slideout Bighorn 3750FL offers a wide range of residential amenities in a package that's designed for full-time RV living. The roof, side walls and floors are all laminated fiberglass, adding to long-term durability. The front living room features a 55-inch LED TV with a home-entertainment system, Power Recline theater seats with built-in heaters and massagers, and two plush flip-and-fold sofas that offer additional sleeping positions.

Glazed hardwood chestnut cabinets and fascia lend a residential feeling, while the master bedroom features a king-size bed, built-in cabinets and a full-size dresser with four large drawers. Plus, the Bighorn offers a cavernous 8- x 10-foot pass-through storage bay, making it easy to pack most bulky items.



BIGHORN 3750FL

Exterior Length	41' 9"
Exterior Width	8'
Exterior Height	13' 3"
Interior Height	8' 9"
Freshwater Cap.	73 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	45 gal. / 90 gal.
LP-gas Cap.	14 gal.
Hitch Weight	1,785 lbs.
GVWR	16,000 lbs.
MSRP	\$87,900, well equipped

Heartland Recreational Vehicles

877-262-8032, www.heartlandrvs.com



Jayco

Jayco clearly had entertainment on the brain when it designed the Pinnacle 38FLFS. The front lounge in the five-slide fiver offers a giant 60-inch LED TV over an optional electric fireplace. A sofa with an integrated chaise and an ottoman are situated across from another convertible sofa.

Cabinets throughout are hardwood with mortise-and-tenon joints, and the drawers all feature full-extension ball-bearing guides. An 18-cubic-foot residential refrigerator holds plenty of food, and the large galley with solid-surface countertops makes meal prep easy. The master suite features a king bed and a 32-inch TV, while the lavatory is highlighted by a large corner shower and handy linen closet. Jayco offers one-year roadside assistance for the Pinnacle, in addition to a two-year overall warranty.



PINNACLE 38FLFS

Exterior Length	42' 7"
Exterior Width	8'
Exterior Height	13' 3 1/4"
Interior Height	8' 11 1/4" main area; 8' 6 1/4" lounge
Freshwater Cap.	75 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	37 gal. / 72 gal.
LP-gas Cap.	14 gal.
Hitch Weight	2,265 lbs.
GVWR	15,950 lbs.
MSRP	base \$71,057

Jayco

574-825-5861, www.jayco.com



Keystone

The six-slide (yes, six slideouts) Montana 3711FL offers a front living room with dual trifold sofa beds housed in opposing slides, with an additional streetside unit that makes for a sectional sofa feel. There's a 48-inch LED HDTV mounted above the optional electric fireplace, a Blu-ray player and surround-sound.

Galley highlights include an 18-cubic-foot refrigerator, an island and a convection microwave, while a free-standing table in the dining area adds versatility. Upscale flourishes include a vaulted ceiling accentuated by LED backlit crown molding, hardwood fascia around the slideouts, a 35,000-Btu furnace and a sky dome over the tub. Aluminum wheels, frameless windows, 5-inch arched roof rafters and a giant drop-frame pass-through storage compartment are exterior standards.



MONTANA 3711FL

Exterior Length	40' 8"
Exterior Width	8'
Exterior Height	12' 11"
Interior Height	8' 7" main floor
Freshwater Cap.	66 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	50 gal. / 93 gal.
LP-gas Cap.	14 gal.
Hitch Weight	2,540 lbs. (approx.)
GVWR	16,540 lbs. (approx.)
MSRP	\$77,200 (approx.)

Keystone RV Company

866-425-4369, www.keystonerv.com

KZ

The Durango Gold 380FL offers a host of desirable amenities for full-time living. The exterior features ivory high-gloss fiberglass side walls and a painted front cap. Other standard features include hydraulic slides and landing gear, a quad step, a Rota Flex kingpin box, 7,000-pound-rated axles, a heated command center, Reflective Technology insulation, a keyless entry door and large pass-through storage.

The front living room contains a 50-inch HDTV, surround-sound upgraded stereo, two trifold sofa beds and theater seating. The galley offers solid-surface countertops, a flush-mounted 22-inch cooktop with glass cover, a 30-inch microwave, a ceiling fan, a pullout trash bin and a 12-cubic-foot refrigerator. The lavatory is home to a 48-inch shower with an integrated seat, and a cabinet is preplumbed for a washer/dryer combo. Other standards include raised-panel cabinet doors and a king bed in the rear bedroom.



DURANGO GOLD 380FL

Exterior Length	41' 7"	Hitch Weight	2,250 lbs.
Exterior Width	8' 5"	GVWR	14,500 lbs.
Exterior Height	12' 11"	MSRP	\$65,000
Interior Height	6' 4" lounge		
Freshwater Cap.	67 gal.	KZ RV	
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	57 gal. / 57 gal.	866-472-5460	
LP-gas Cap.	14 gal.	www.kz-rv.com	



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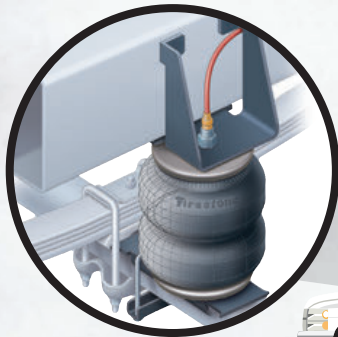
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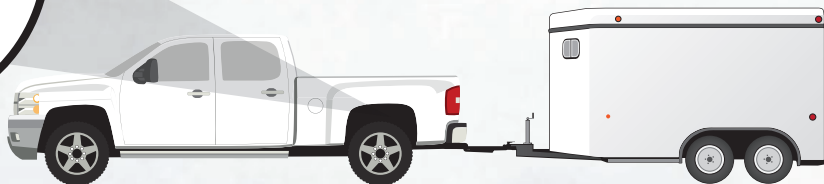
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Winnebago

One of the most frustrating aspects of watching a movie or sporting event with a large group is finding a seat. Well, that shouldn't be a problem with the Destination 37FL. In addition to the usual opposing sofas in the front living room, Winnebago has added a third couch, resulting in seating for six to nine people with ease. All occupants can get a great view of the big-screen TV in the entertainment cabinet, and buyers can opt for an optional electric fireplace with a radius front for upgraded aesthetics.

The rest of the fifth-wheel ain't too shabby either, with LED lighting throughout, an open kitchen with an island, a 20-plus-cubic-foot refrigerator with an icemaker, and a large 60-inch shower. Other highlights include aluminum entry steps, a nifty magic mirror reflection entertainment center in the master, solid-surface countertops, optional full-body paint and six-point hydraulic leveling.



DESTINATION 37FL

Exterior Length	42'
Exterior Width	8' 4"
Exterior Height	13' 3"
Interior Height	8' 9" galley
Freshwater Cap.	100 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	33 gal. / 66 gal.
LP-gas Cap.	14 gal.

Hitch Weight	TBD
GVWR	15,500 lbs.
MSRP	\$78,200-\$125,400

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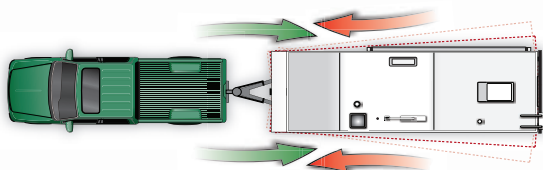


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LOUISVILLE SLUGGERS

2015 TRAVEL TRAILERS AND FIFTH-WHEELS THAT KNOCKED IT OUT OF THE PARK AT THE ANNUAL RVIA SHOW IN KENTUCKY

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You might know Louisville, Kentucky, for a lot of things. In addition to being the largest city in the state, it is home to the world-famous Kentucky Derby, legendary boxing champ Muhammad Ali and, as you may have gathered by the title, the Louisville Slugger baseball bat. But what you may not know is that Louisville — just 271 miles south of the RV industry's hub in Elkhart, Indiana — becomes the nation's hotbed of RV activity one week out of the year when the annual trade show for the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) rolls into town the week after Thanksgiving. It's where the industry shows off its latest and greatest, from pop-up trailers to 40-plus-foot luxury fifth-wheels, toy haulers and more.

Every year, we notice trends in the trailer segment, and this year's are roomier bunkhouses, luxury toy haulers and larger lightweights. The RV industry seems focused like never before on providing something for everyone, and the result is an impressive display of creativity and ingenuity in the 2015 trailers. Here are just a few that got our attention:

.....

article by **Chris Hemer and Rick Kessler** photos by **Shawn Spence**



**KEYSTONE FUZION CHROME 422
FIFTH-WHEEL TOY HAULER ▶**

Manufacturers are finally making the garage area a comfortable place to hang out when the toys are outside. The 43-foot Fuzion Chrome 422 not only offers a ramp door that turns into a deck but employs a new Fast-Track patio system that makes deploying the railing much faster and easier. Inside the garage are dual opposing sofas with a queen bed above, overhead cabinetry, a television, and — wait for it — a full bath for getting cleaned up before entering the living area or for using the garage as a second bedroom. Step through the doorway and you're immediately greeted by a 48-inch LED TV, a glowing electric fireplace in the entertainment center, theater seating and an island kitchen with an 18-cubic-foot Samsung residential refrigerator. Up front is the second bath, with a residential shower, and a master suite featuring a king bed and a wardrobe slideout. Retail pricing on the Fuzion Chrome 422 will be around \$85,000, and GVWR is 19,000 pounds.



The rear patio was the last great thing to happen to toy-hauler ramp doors, and the Fast-Track patio system, shown on the Keystone Fuzion Chrome, is the newest. Instead of individual rail sections, the Fast-Track assembly stores in the entryway, then simply unfolds and telescopes into place.

**KEYSTONE RAPTOR 424TS
FIFTH-WHEEL TOY HAULER ▼**

Toy haulers, even those of the large fifth-wheel variety, tend to have a living area that feels cramped. The new 43-foot Raptor 424TS not only has a huge 14-foot garage, it also sports an open-concept living area complete

with a fixed L-shaped sofa with theater seating and a roomy L-shaped kitchen with an 18-cubic-foot Norcold RV refrigerator. Up front is the entertainment center with doorways on either side — one leads directly to the bath, the other to the bedroom. The master suite features a walk-around king bed



The Keystone Raptor 424TS features an open-concept living area with an L-shaped sofa right in the middle of the action, with a large flat-screen TV in an entertainment center up front.

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• 14,600 cu. in. of storage

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\$319.99 REG. PRICE \$649.99 **SAVE \$330**



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PITTSBURGH RAPID PUMP® 4 TON HEAVY DUTY STEEL FLOOR JACK

• Weighs 105 lbs.

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• SAE and Metric

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and a wardrobe slideout with a 32-inch TV. Outside, a new Raptor Red color scheme joins the three other full-body paint treatments, as well as partial-paint offerings. No pricing was available at press time, but the dry weight is 15,500 and GVWR is 18,000 pounds.

KEYSTONE MONTANA HIGH COUNTRY 340BH FIFTH-WHEEL ▶

One of the paradoxes of the RV industry is that the largest units are usually intended for traveling couples, while smaller travel trailers are designed for families. The Montana High Country 340BH flies in the face of convention, offering a 40-foot 11-inch, quad-slide fifth-wheel floorplan that can sleep as many as 12 and accommodate all in comfort. "With so many bunkroom models, you might have two seating areas in the bedroom but not in the living/kitchen area," said Mark Krol, Montana High Country product manager. "But with this unit, you've got theater seats and a hide-a-bed sofa, plus a dinette in the living space." Not only that, all seating positions have a comfortable view of the entertainment center, which houses an electric fireplace and a flat-screen television, and there's still room for a kitchen island. The TV-ready rear bunkhouse offers three bunks and a jiffy sofa, plus a wardrobe and drawers, while the outside kitchen is equipped with a sink, refrigerator and two-burner stove.



The Keystone Montana High Country 340BH offers two separate seating areas centered around a flat-screen TV and fireplace, plus a dinette and a rear bunkhouse.

Up front is the lone bathroom, which features a large 48- x 30-inch shower, and the master suite with a large wardrobe and another flatscreen TV. "It's really a very complete floorplan," said Krol.

Keystone RV Company
866-425-4369
www.keystonerv.com



▶ Keystone introduced a sinister-looking matte-finish paint scheme at Louisville called **Black Label Edition**. Offered on any Voltage toy-hauler floorplan, the special paint is an extra-cost option over other full-body paint finishes.



Just another fifth-wheel? No, it's the Dutchmen Denali 325RL travel trailer, with fifth-wheel hallmarks like an island kitchen, huge pantry and forward hutch.

DUTCHMEN DENALI 325RL TRAVEL TRAILER ▲

A lot of people would love to have a large fifth-wheel floorplan but don't have the truck to tow it with. The new Denali 325RL solves this problem in a 35-foot 9-inch travel trailer that lives like a fifth-wheel and has a dry weight of only 8,400 pounds. "The

main focus of this product is the living area, of course, and the kitchen area in particular," said Troy James, Dutchmen's vice president of sales. "There's a large island, as well as a tremendous number of cabinets and drawers, and a huge pantry." The trailer also sports a new front cap, blue LED lighting, a standard power awning

and an Oyster exterior color with Arlon graphics and a matching tan DiFlex roof.

COLEMAN LANTERN EDITION LIGHTWEIGHT TRAVEL TRAILER

Does buying an inexpensive travel trailer mean you've got to sacrifice creature comforts? Coleman, a Dutchmen brand, doesn't think so. Its Expedition Series is now called the Lantern Edition, and it's feature-loaded, especially considering its price point. "We've simplified everything by bundling our options instead of offering 20 or so à la carte," explained Troy James, vice president of sales. "Now there are only two stand-alone options (a spare tire and a 15,000-Btu air conditioner) and two bundled packages, the Yukon and the Adirondack." James said the Yukon adds a few niceties, while the Adirondack brings aluminum wheels, a power A-frame jack and solid-surface countertops.

KODIAK EXPRESS ULTRALIGHT EXPANDABLE AND STANDARD TRAVEL TRAILERS

The Kodiak Express expandable is available in a new floorplan, the 206ES. "The nice thing about this floorplan is that everything is usable when the beds are stowed," said Matt Gipson, product manager for Kodiak. "You can still take a nap, access the refrigerator or visit the bathroom. And it lives like a 30-footer once it's expanded." Four floorplans are offered across the Kodiak expandable line, ranging from 17 to 22 feet in length and weighing 3,100 to 4,500 pounds.

Kodiak, a division of Dutchmen, also introduced four new ultralight floorplans in its standard Express trailer line, including the 286BHSL bunkhouse model featuring a double-over-double bunk in the rear. "It has the same contemporary feel as more upscale products," said Gipson. "It offers a big wardrobe, a huge pantry,



The Oakmont is a new brand for Heartland and is intended to offer high-end features at a midlevel price. Bunkhouse and couple's floorplans will be the main focus.

stainless-steel appliances and only three options: a 15,000-Btu air conditioner, a trifold sofa and a TV. Everything else comes standard."

Dutchmen Manufacturing
574-537-0600
www.dutchmen.com

HEARTLAND OAKMONT FIFTH-WHEEL ▲

A new brand for Heartland RV, the Oakmont fifth-wheel lineup offers consumers high-end features at a price point between \$52,000 and \$54,000. "We're addressing two segments with the Oakmont: the

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 EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

couple's coach and the bunkhouse," explained Kary Katzenberger, general manager for Heartland's Bighorn and Oakmont brands. "We've spent a lot of time looking at interior home designs and are trying to bring that residential feel back into this segment." To that end, the Oakmont is available with a 50-inch LED television, a residential refrigerator and microwave, stackable washer/dryer prep, a king-size bed, a one-piece fiberglass shower and plenty of closet space. In addition, Oakmont will offer standard and optional features such as a six-point hydraulic leveling system, hydraulic slide rooms, 16-inch wheels, 7,000-pound axles and pass-through storage. The Oakmont will be offered in six or seven traditional fifth-wheel floorplans ranging from 35 to 41 feet. Of particular interest to those with large families will be the QB (quad bunk) models, designed to sleep eight to 10 people comfortably. On display at Louisville was the 395QB, which



The Oakmont 395QB features residential kitchen appliances and a separate rear bunkhouse that can sleep up to five, complete with its own half-bath, storage and television.

offers a curbside dinette, a large kitchen and a rear bunkhouse equipped with its own half-bath. "It's really like a separate bedroom, not just

another sleeping area," said Katzenberger. The three QB models range from 41.7 to 42.7 feet, and all feature an outdoor kitchen.

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**HEARTLAND EDGE
FIFTH-WHEEL TOY HAULER ▶**

Heartland also rolled out its all-new Edge toy-hauler product line, which at press time consists of four fifth-wheels and one travel trailer floorplan in lengths from 36 to 44 feet. Shown at Louisville was the Edge 357 fifth-wheel, a double-axle model that comes standard with a 50-inch flatscreen, two pantries, a residential refrigerator with an inverter and extra battery, a built-in fireplace and an 11-foot garage with a half-bath. An L-shaped loft provides sleeping space for the kids, and the large bedroom area features a Jack-and-Jill bathroom with a sunken tub/shower. "Our demographic has changed," explained A.J. Jones, general manager for Heartland toy haulers (Cyclone, Road Warrior, Torque and Edge). "Forty percent of our buyers are using toy haulers for a bunkhouse, work area, etc. We're going to expand significantly. Right now we hold about 25 percent of the market share in



The Edge is yet another toy-hauler brand in the Heartland portfolio. The 357 fifth-wheel, shown above, features an 11-foot garage with its own half-bath.

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toy-hauler sales and [are] growing rapidly." The 357 sells for around \$65,000, but overall the Edge line will be in the high \$40,000 to \$80,000 price range, according to Heartland.

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**FLAGSTAFF SUPERLITE
 23FBDS TRAVEL TRAILER ▶**

A new double-slide floorplan for the Forest River Flagstaff Superlite travel trailer line was turning heads at the Louisville show. The 23FBDS model's opposing slides (one housing the kitchen galley and the other a dinette) and Murphy-bed/sofa feature create a wide-open living space that is about 24 feet long. The 23FBDS will appeal to couples who want ease of use and plenty of space, said Brett Doberenz of Forest River. "A lot of customers who are empty-nesters had bunkhouses and



The Forest River Flagstaff 23FBDS offers a kitchen slideout with an opposing dinette slideout, a front-sofa/Murphy-bed arrangement and a roomy floorplan with a corner bath.

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then went and got the fifth-wheel," he said. "Now it's too much to handle, and they want to downsize. This is a trailer that's going to give them lighter weight in a shorter alternative that still has a lot of room inside." Available with an Emerald package upgrade, the 23FBDS has a dry weight of about 5,100 pounds, and the MSRP is in the mid-\$20,000s.

**ROCKWOOD HIGH WALL
A212HW TRAVEL TRAILER ▶**

Forest River was busy at the Louisville show demonstrating the motorized roof lift system on the Rockwood High Wall A212HW, a unit that combines the solid exterior of a travel trailer with the convenience of a tent camper. Setup time is less than a minute, according to the company. "We've been a tent-trailer manufacturer for 40 years now," said Forest River's John Stringer. "For the people who don't want the canvas, we've developed the hard-side tent trailer, which eliminates the canvas. It's really a collapsible travel trailer."



The Rockwood High Wall A212HW offers the low profile and easy towing of a tent trailer with the hard sides of a travel trailer.

The 212HW comes in at just 2,332 pounds (dry weight) yet is barely 5 feet high when collapsed, so it tows like a breeze and can be stored in a conventional garage. MSRP is \$13,800 for

a very well-equipped model.

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**WINNEBAGO SPYDER 24FQ
TRAVEL TRAILER TOY HAULER ▶**

In sharp contrast to the rest of its lineup, the Winnebago Spyder 24FQ, the first-ever toy hauler from the towable division of Winnebago, features a deep black gel-coat fiberglass exterior augmented with red swooshes and reflective graphics. On the inside, innovations include seamless faux-concrete countertops, contrasting wood-grain finishes and webbing (not netting) to stow gear in keeping with the Spyder theme. "Toy-hauler owners want something that's different, something that makes them look special when they're out in the desert with their bikes," said Winnebago Towables President Johnny Hernandez. The prototype at the Louisville show was produced with little time to spare, Hernandez said.

Production started in January and three floorplans are now available. MSRP is about \$45,000. Admittedly late to the toy-hauler party, Winnebago is



The Winnebago Spyder toy hauler looks cool with black gel-coat fiberglass and red graphics.

more interested in quality than a rush to market, Hernandez said. "The Spyder is a significant addition to our products, and we're going to follow it up with a fifth-wheel toy hauler on the Destination platform. So now we'll have everything from a small lightweight travel trailer

all the way up to a big fifth-wheel toy hauler. We'll have every segment covered," he said.

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ONE HOT ITALIAN

THE CLASSY STAINLESS-STEEL SMEV OVEN AND RANGE COOKS EVEN BETTER THAN IT LOOKS

During the last 15 years or so, the general style and overall function of the RV stove and oven have remained the same. Minute improvements and a few safety features have been added, especially regarding the oven pilot function. While durability as a whole has been very good, cooking on these ranges, and especially baking in the oven, has been less than desirable for the serious chef in the family.

For those looking to upgrade their cooking experience, there's an entry from Italy that hasn't had much exposure in the United States thus far, but under the wing of Dometic, that could change. Dometic's imported SMEV stove-and-oven combination is a finely crafted appliance made of premium 304L grade (18/10) stainless steel, and, the good news is, it can be retrofitted relatively painlessly.

SMEV created its premium stove-and-oven range to set the standard for high-quality RV cooking appliances in European-made RVs. Not only does the 304 stainless provide a highly corrosion-resistant foundation, it matches nicely in RVs with stainless-steel microwave ovens and/or residential-style refrigerators. The sleek SMEV design allows for accurate, home-quality broiling, cooking and baking — modern advantages



(1) The original stove-and-oven combination was a basic model that did not include a burner cover. **(2)** Locating all of the mounting screws that hold the original range in place can be a challenge. **(3)** Always use extra caution whenever you are installing, removing or replacing an LP-gas line. **(4)** Take care not to scratch yourself or the cabinetry on the sharp metal edges when removing the existing range.

usually not found in an RV unless it's equipped with a high-quality microwave/convection oven.

Due to the compact size of most RV stove-and-oven combinations, 17-inch ranges are the norm, placing the oven burner so close to the baking pan or sheet that the temperatures within the oven are difficult to control. Even lighting the oven burner can be a difficult task and requires one to kneel on the floor with a flashlight and a long igniter — many times needing the help of a second person to push the reset button while lighting the pilot. Open up the oven door two or three times, and the set temperature will quickly be lost. With temperatures this hard to control and no way to see what you are cooking without a flashlight, even the best chefs are left wondering if their baked goods and prepared dishes will be cooked properly.

SMEV's patented jet-flow-sealed burners not only are designed to consume 33 percent less LP-gas but



(5) Rubber gas lines are susceptible to damage caused from protruding staples and screws, so be sure to keep them out of harm's way. (6) When working with wood exercise patience. Cabinet modifications will need to be made, and there is not much room for error. (7) The SMEV is roughly 1½ inches narrower than the original range, thus requiring a spacer board to be installed on both sides of the cabinet to fill the gaps. (8) Both spacer boards required sanding for a precise fit.

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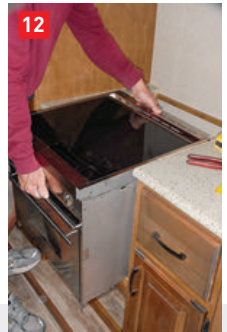


RECLINERS



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(9) Always measure twice before cutting! **(10 and 11)** Pre-drill all of the woodwork before reinstalling the mounting screws. **(12)** Proper installation of the new SMEV required a bit of patient manipulation, as the new configuration of space was rather snug.

allow for more efficient cooking, especially when using the high-output front burner. The ingenious design of the SMEV oven burner helps prevent the burned-on-the-bottom-and-not-baked-in-the-middle problem commonly experienced with RV gas ovens. And lighting the oven burner (as well as the stovetop burners) is as simple as holding in the temperature knob and pushing the switch for the built-in igniter.

Safety is a concern for many RVers due to the volatility of LP-gas and the fact that the stove is the only place in an RV where there's an open flame and source of propane. If a burner is accidentally turned on without a flame, the inside

of the RV can be filled with explosive gases. The SMEV stove-and-oven combination has a thermocouple safety shutoff for the cooktop and oven burners. If any of the burner knobs are accidentally turned on (while serving food or if Fido jumps up to take a look), the flow of propane is prevented. Propane can flow only if the burner is lit and the thermocouple sends a message to the control valve. The oven door also utilizes a safety micro switch for added peace of mind.

The SMEV features a multiple-layer glass oven door that greatly reduces surface temperatures; a 12-volt DC interior light allows a clear view of cooking food. Continuing

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ONE HOT ITALIAN

the high-end Italian look is the chic tempered-black-glass burner cover that provides a welcome extra work surface when the stove is not in use.

Installation time will vary depending on the range size and style to be replaced. Our project SMEV stove-and-oven combo was slated for use in a rig with the aforementioned 17-inch standard three-burner cooktop and oven. Because of the European sizing, we knew that the cabinetry would have to be modified. Fortunately, wood is a very easy material to work with. The cutout in the countertop was not a problem, as the SMEV's top flange fit snugly into the original space.

However, the SMEV was higher than the original stove-and-oven combo, requiring that the support shelf be lowered and the slide-out drawer under the shelf be modified. It only took the removal of a few screws to dislodge the shelf, which provided access to lower the front cross member by almost 2 inches



13



14



15



16

(13) When attaching the 12-volt DC wiring, be certain to use high-quality butt connectors for trouble-free operation. **(14)** The SMEV's superior construction is evident throughout its design. **(15)** Switches for the oven light and igniter are found in the left side of the front panel. **(16)** The stainless-steel sealed burner makes cleaning fast and simple.

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(held in by four countersunk screws).

We carefully measured before drilling new holes to accommodate the new location of the front cross member. The lower-slide-drawer configuration was a little more of a challenge. The depth of the drawer was low enough to clear the front cross member, but the faceplate of the drawer needed to be cut down almost 2 inches to clear the bottom of the SMEV.

We removed and cut off the bottom of the drawer face to avoid modifying and staining the top edge, then re-installed the drawer face 2 inches lower than originally set. Since the cut drawer face ended up only an inch above the floor, restaining and rerouting the edge was not necessary because it was out of sight.

The next step was to run positive and negative wires from a nearby source to the SMEV. Fortunately, the refrigerator was the adjoining appliance, so a hole was drilled through the

separating wall and the wires attached to the incoming 12-volt DC source that powers the refrigerator.

Before we were done, the wires running through the wall were sealed to prevent any possibility of carbon-monoxide intrusion. There was no problem attaching the original gas line to the new stove and oven since it was long enough to reach the connection on the back of the stove. Before permanently installing the SMEV, the LP-gas was turned on to check for leaks.

A modification was made to the back section of the countertop, and after securing with screws, the range was set to go — except for a miscalculation in the clearance of the cooktop cover under the existing range hood. The test trailer was fitted with an extra-large range hood, and the cooktop cover would not open all the way. Although there are slimmer range hoods on the market, we chose to build a new one using some of the components from the old range

hood. This added time to the project but in the long run was worth the effort.

Cooking on and in the SMEV is a pleasure. While the burners are nicely spaced for accommodating all sizes of pots and pans, and the surface is sealed and easy to clean, the best benefit comes from cooking in the oven. It's big enough to handle large pans required to cook for at least six people. Temperature is accurate, and food is baked evenly — and there's no risk when baking cakes and breads.

Once the SMEV was installed, standing back and admiring the beauty and craftsmanship of the new range was a big part of the reward for making the switch. Simply put, after cooking many meals with the SMEV, it easily outperforms our highest expectations.

The SMEV model CU434I0730000US has an MSRP of \$975. 🚚

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TINTED LOVE

New direct-replacement entry-door window provides outside visibility and an element of privacy

How many times have you wished you could see out of your RV's entry-door window, especially at night when someone knocks without warning? Not many people are comfortable opening the door without visual identification, yet just about all entry-door windows are frosted to admit light while providing privacy. Since visibility out of this window is blurred at best, most of us fumble with a day/night blind in a nearby window to get a view of who's knocking. Ross RV Innovations solves this common problem with its easy-to-install, direct-replacement Clear View entry-door window kit.

The Clear View RV window is made from a unique type of tempered safety glass that lets you see out, day or night, while keeping prying eyes from peering into your RV. The kit is designed to fit 90 percent of the entry-door window frames in service, replacing the existing glass with a black glass that will give the RV a more modern look. The glass matches the dark tinted windows on all sides of most RVs.

Installation shouldn't take longer than 45 minutes. Most of the job can be performed by one person, but it helps to have a couple of extra hands when reinstalling the inside and outside frames at once. The Clear View entry-door window kit comes complete with instructions, adhesive sealant tape and the black tempered glass. You will need duct tape, a Phillips head screwdriver, a small putty knife (use plastic unless you're ex-

perienced with this procedure), rubbing alcohol and glass cleaner.

Before starting the removal, four large pieces of duct tape are used to secure the outside frame to the glass to prevent the window from falling out when removing the frame assembly. Once the screws are removed from the inside frame, the putty knife is used to pry off the outside frame (with the glass duct-taped to it) in one piece.

The top of the outside window frame is marked (this will be used to locate the top side of the window frame), and the frame is then set on a flat surface for glass removal. After removing the four pieces of duct tape, the glass is pried loose from the adhesive tape and frame. The adhesive seal tape will have to be removed from the edge of the frame and the inner window surface. Any caulking that remains on the outside edge of the exterior frame and the surface of the entry door will also

(1) The Clear View entry-door window kit comes packaged to prevent damage during shipping. (2) Use high-quality duct tape to ensure adhesion and prevent accidents. (3) When removing the inside frame, have a helper hold the outside frame and glass assembly.



TINTED LOVE

have to be removed.

With the exterior window frame on a flat surface, the inner and outer window seal tape is installed, starting at the top center of the window frame. The tape is slowly unrolled, following the instruction diagram, and pushed firmly onto the surface. Care must be taken when going around the corners so the tape stays even. This tape is very sticky, but if you make a mistake, don't worry — simply cut out that section and apply another piece of sealing tape.

Using glass cleaner and a paper towel, both sides of the black tempered glass are cleaned and set aside. The backing is removed from the seal tape and the glass installed on the outside window frame by pushing it securely into place using firm pressure all the way around the edges. While the glass



(4) Mark the top of the inside window frame before removal to help with placement during reinstallation. **(5)** Carefully pry the frame and glass assembly from the entry door to prevent breaking the plastic frame and scratching the entry door. **(6)** Grasp the glass and frame assembly together — just in case the glass separates from the frame.

should be sealed in place, using duct tape on the outside of the frame and the glass allows for extra insurance during reinstallation.

Before the window and frame are reinstalled, it's best to clean the

outside surface of the entry door with alcohol. The backing is then slowly peeled off the outer-door seal tape and the frame and glass pushed into place so the seal comes in contact with the surface of the entry door.

Opposite page: (7 and 8) Pull gently while removing the original inner and outer sealing tape to prevent leftover pieces. **(9)** Gently remove the original glass from the outside frame. **(10 and 11)** Install the new inner and outer seals, taking extra care not to damage the delicate material around the corners. **(12)** Set the new glass against the bottom stops and use your fingers to center the glass for a final installation.

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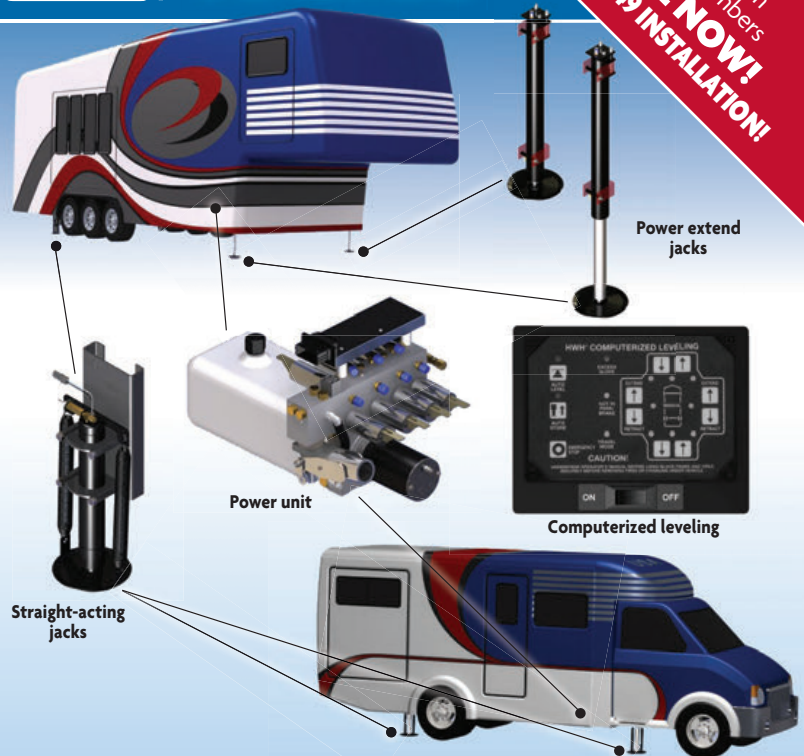
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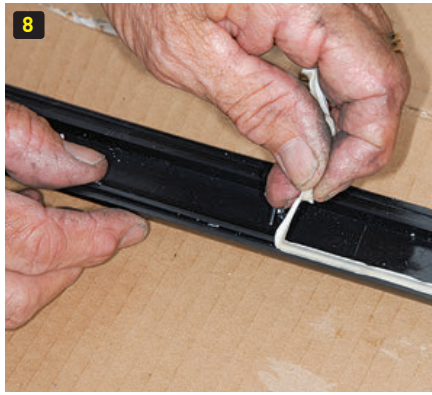
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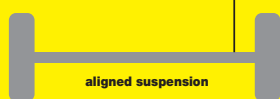
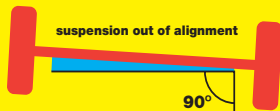
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You'll probably want two people for this process, because once the seal tape on the frame makes contact with the entry-door surface, it will be very difficult to move.

After aligning the holes in the outside and inside frames, the original screws are reinstalled. The frames are plastic, so go easy here to prevent stripping. If the seal tape is installed correctly, sealant will not be required around the outside window frame.

Although the new window really dressed up the door and provided a wonderful view of the outside, it's not completely private at night when the interior lighting is on. If the lighting inside is low, it's more difficult to see inside. During the day it's virtually impossible to see inside without putting your eyes flush with the glass.

To help with the privacy issue, the company has recently introduced a window cover with a new twist: It's designed to be installed on the screen



[13] Use duct tape to hold the glass and outer frame in place for a one-person job. [14 and 15] Install the inside frame top side up and do not overtighten the screws. The plastic frame will certainly crack when overtightened.

door, using strong magnets. That allows it to be rolled up during the day and closed at night, without having to open the door and separate the screen door.

The company will also start offering window frames that have been painted. The advantage here is that over time the plastic will not become sun bleached or weathered and turn white, which can look pretty ugly against the exterior wall and dark tinted window.

Clear View entry-door window products are sold exclusively at Camping World (888-626-7576, www.campingworld.com, catalog item 74221), and the website has an instruction video. The window kit retails for \$134.99, the window cover is \$79.99, and the painted window frame sells for \$89.99. 🚐

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TOP STORY

FOR A FRACTION OF THE COST OF A NEW HARDWARE ASSEMBLY, DO-IT-YOURSELFERS CAN REPLACE THEIR RV'S SLIDE-TOPPER FABRIC THEMSELVES

The humble slide-topper awning is the unsung hero of our RVing experiences. Just think of all the work these awnings do: They keep the sun off slideout roofs, which helps prevent UV damage, and, during the winter, they deflect rain and snow and prevent

leaves, pine needles and other debris from landing on slideout roofs, which reduces cleaning efforts and extends the life of seals and slide mechanisms.

But as faithful a friend as they may be, slideout toppers don't last forever — eventually the sun and environmental

article and photos by Chris Hemer

foes like acid rain and ozone take their toll on the awning material, causing it to fade, split and crack. At some point, a replacement will be necessary. The good news is, you don't have to install the entire assembly — just the material itself.

Dometic offers replacement fabric that can be ordered in a wide selection of materials, sizes and colors to suit most RVs. The process isn't very difficult, but you must be able to accurately measure the size of the fabric to make sure the new material properly fits the slide-topper assembly. You'll also need some hand tools, some DIY know-how and some basic knowledge of how the assembly works.

The fabric is under spring pressure, so it is imperative that the assembly be handled with extreme care to prevent injury. Also, bear in mind that the



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TOP STORY



(1) The old slide-topper fabric had been subjected to the elements for years and was practically disintegrating. (2) Rather than slide the old fabric out of the rail, the easiest way is to just cut it with a knife. The slideout was deployed a few inches to create tension in the fabric, after which it was very easy to cut.

material can be quite cumbersome to handle on your own, so it's probably a good idea to ask an adventurous friend for some help with this one.

We recently installed new slideout-topper fabric on a 2005 Itasca motorhome that has spent its life in Southern California and was stored outdoors. The fabric had deteriorated to the point that it was no longer functional, which naturally put a damper on any camping trips last summer. We ordered three rolls of material for the varying sizes on the coach, which were installed in about two hours per awning.

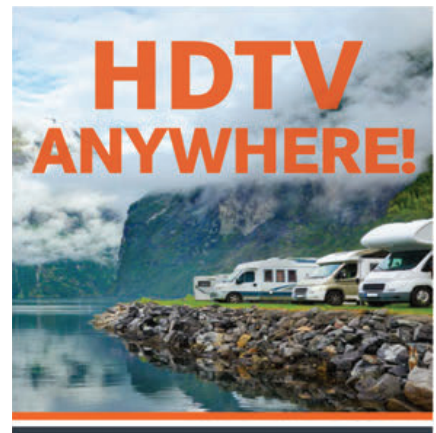
If an installation such as this one is beyond the scope of your abilities, have no fear — a qualified RV repair center or Camping World can do the work for you. And you won't have to wait for a special-order size to arrive; Dometic recently began offering bulk SlideTopper fabric to its dealers. The material comes in a dispenser box and can be rolled out and cut to the desired width. It has preinstalled poly cords and is available in black and white, so unless you need to order a special color, contact your dealer first to make sure they have bulk fabric if you plan to have the replacement material installed for you. Figure around \$400 for the fabric and labor for each slideout topper.



(3 and 4) Loosen the screws that secure the fabric to the roof rail and slide out the remaining awning fragment.



(5) The roller-tube arms are secured to the mounting bracket by a $\frac{3}{16}$ - x $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch aluminum rivet, which must be drilled out. (6) With help from a friend, the tube assembly can now be removed. Even with the rivets drilled out, it might take some wiggling to get the tube free. Hold the tube arm tightly and carefully unwind it, counting the number of revolutions until there is no more tension in the spring. Make sure you mark the direction before unwinding. You'll have to wind on the new material with roughly the same number of revolutions.



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TOP STORY



(7) With the assembly safely on the ground, the old material can be removed from the slot in the tube. (8) Lay the tube on top of the old material to keep it clean, then feed the material into the slot in the tube. (9) Wind the arm the same number of revolutions as when it came off (in this case, about eight revolutions), then reinstall it on the octagonal bracket. It might be useful to add one or two more winds because the springs get weaker over a period of time. (10) Once properly centered on the rods, the pop rivets are reinstalled.



(11) The new slide-topper awning looks great and is ready to provide protection for the slide-out roof for many years to come. 🚐

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Drop-In

Cequent Performance Products recently announced the release of its Drop-In fifth-wheel hitch by Reese. Made specifically to fit Ram 2500 and 3500 heavy-duty trucks with the factory-installed OE rail system, the custom 20K hitch features Cequent's Elite Series fifth-wheel head and built-in handles for easy and safe installation and removal. The hitch is rated to tow 20,000 pounds with a 5,000-pound pin-weight capacity. Its sleek yet sturdy design features a 9-inch-wide funnel for easier hookup, a single forged wraparound jaw for a quieter ride and a black powder-coat finish. Covered by a limited lifetime warranty, the Reese Drop-In fifth-wheel hitch is available from a variety of retailers.

MSRP: About \$1,100

800-632-3290, www.cequentgroup.com

Circle 157 on Reader Service Card



Rest Up

Lots of folding chairs are designed for the RV lifestyle, ranging from the basic to the bodacious. But no matter which you've chosen, there's one thing missing to complete your relaxation time: an ottoman. Thankfully, Camping World has come to the rescue with Mac Sports' Outdoor Ottoman (catalog item 75001), a portable folding footrest made from 600-denier weather-resistant polyester on a tubular steel frame. Measuring 20 x 20 inches and standing 17½ inches tall, the Outdoor Ottoman folds to just 7 x 7 x 24 inches.

This is one we've tested ourselves, and it comes highly recommended. There's even a matching blue club chair (\$58.89, catalog item 74235).

MSRP: \$17.77

888-626-7576, www.campingworld.com

Circle 158 on Reader Service Card



Play On

Playing cards and board games requires a table and chairs — and depending on the size of your rig, you may not have storage space for them. The new Roll-X folding table and chairs set is a clever, space-saving solution. Available at Camping World (catalog item 81955), the table and four chairs fold and store compactly on a rolling rack that converts to the table base. Simply unfold the top, lock it open and place it on the open table base. A handle and built-in wheels make for easy transport to your favorite spot. Weighing in at a little more than 50 pounds, the Roll-X stands 36 inches long x 36 inches wide x 28¾ inches high when open, and folds to 38½ inches long x 21 inches wide x 10½ inches deep for storage.

MSRP: \$169.99

888-626-7576, www.campingworld.com

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Flow Down

The Flow Down adjustable RV drain-support system from Lippert Components keeps the sewer hose off the ground and adjusts to nearly any slope, preventing backups. The legs of each section can be adjusted by using the plastic knobs, or they can be inverted so the knobs can be used as sturdy platforms in loose soil or mud — no more carrying lumber, rocks or modified PVC pipe. If a bend in the hose is needed to get around an object, just eliminate one section of half pipe and set two double fittings end to end to make the desired angle. One kit extends to more than 10 feet, expandable to 20 feet by adding a second kit. Flow Down sets up quickly and stores in the included bag.

MSRP: \$79.99. 574-537-8900, www.store.lci1.com/flowdown

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Starting Batteries

As winter winds down and the peak RVing season is just ahead, it's a great time to think about getting started — your engine, that is. Unfortunately, just like everything else, batteries deteriorate over time, and the rigors of storage and cold weather take their toll. Spring is a good time to think about replacing that old wet-cell battery with a modern high-tech model.

For approximately the first century of automobiles, battery technology changed very little. Lead-acid cells were the only game in town, although more recently low-maintenance batteries started to appear, using lead-antimony to reduce water loss.

Gel, AGM and lithium-ion batteries are all now available for light trucks, SUVs and other vehicles popular for towing. Each design has advantages for certain uses.

Battery Ratings

When it comes time to purchase a battery, beyond whether it will fit or not, most buyers will consider price and warranty. To be a more-informed shopper, it's important to understand the specifications used to rate battery capacity. Engine-starting batteries have two important ratings: Cold Cranking Amps and, to a lesser extent,

Amp-Hours. These two ratings are distinctly different, and one cannot be used to predict the other.

Cold Cranking Amps (CCA) measures the ability of the battery to deliver a large amount of current for a brief period. This rating indicates how effective a battery will be for starting an engine.

The Amp-Hour (Ah) rating measures a battery's ability to deliver a lower current over a longer period of time (amps x hours). This rating indicates how effective a battery will be for operating electrical accessories when the engine isn't running and thus the alternator is not charging the battery.

CCA tests are done at 0 degrees F. CCA has been the industry standard for starting battery ratings, but some battery marketers have been rating batteries at different temperatures,



Odyssey is a major brand of AGM automotive batteries with a wide selection of sizes.

which results in higher ratings. A cranking amps (CA) rating, sometimes called Marine Cranking Amps (MCA), tests battery performance at 32 degrees F (or 0 C). These ratings will be higher than CCA ratings on the same battery.

Be sure to consider CCA versus MCA and Ah ratings when making buying decisions for starting batteries.

Gel Batteries

Gel-cell (more correctly, gelled electrolyte) batteries were the next to come on the scene with a viscous (gelled) electrolyte replacing the liquid electrolyte, which has the consistency of water. Gel batteries are maintenance-free and won't spill out if tipped over.

Gel cells cost more than wet cells, typically don't deliver as high a CCA or Ah rating for a given size or weight, and don't dissipate heat quite as well. However, they tend to last somewhat longer and are better suited for uses where longer-duration discharges are common, such as vehicles that get parked with lights and accessories on. They are also popular for deep-cycle use.

Gel cells work best with a stabilized, regulated charging system, although most alternator-regulator systems



Lifeline makes a variety of AGM batteries, including starting and deep-cycle RV configurations.

are compatible. Check with the battery manufacturer or distributor if you have any questions prior to purchase.

AGM Batteries

Absorbed glass mat (AGM) batteries, also commonly called dry cells, have sulfuric acid absorbed in fine fiberglass matting, so there is no liquid inside. This makes the batteries spill-proof; they can even be mounted on their side and shipped by common carrier. The internal lead plates may be formed flat to fit into a rectangular case, or they can be wound into cylindrical cells that are then joined to form various shapes.

AGM batteries, which became popular in the 1980s in military aircraft and off-road vehicles, are more reliable when subjected to vibration than wet cells. AGM cells can deliver high current for starting and have a considerably longer service life, even if deep-cycled. AGM cells are maintenance-free, are lighter than the

flooded lead-acid type, withstand low temperatures well and have a slow self-discharge rate.

AGMs can accept a charge up to five times faster than wet cells. They can also tolerate deep discharges down to 20 percent remaining, whereas flooded cells should be discharged to only about 50 percent levels to ensure reasonable service life. In addition, AGMs are maintenance-free.

Automotive charging systems often have a fixed voltage setting of 14.4 volts. As with gel cells, AGM batteries are sensitive to overcharging, but these 12-volt batteries can be charged to 14.4 volts without problems. During storage, a float charge should be between about 13.2 and 13.8 volts (warm temperatures may require lower voltage).

AGM batteries cost significantly more than wet cells. However, their high output, resistance to cold, slow self-discharge, slight weight reduction, long service life and resistance to

vibration make them popular with people who like to drive off-road and in rugged conditions.

Lithium-Ion Batteries

Lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries are rechargeable batteries that use lithium as one of their active components. Lightweight portable electronic devices led to the development of Li-ion batteries, which, besides being extremely light, can be mounted in all sorts of positions and don't leak, corrode or require maintenance. At the current state of the art, they are also the most expensive type of engine-starting battery.

Lithium iron phosphate (LFP) batteries are a type of Li-ion battery known for long life and inherent safety. Lithium nickel manganese cobalt oxide (NMC) batteries are another type. Although NMC batteries have a lower energy density than some other formulas, they offer longer life and greater thermal safety.



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As the old racer's adage says: "To go faster, add lightness." That applies to acceleration and hill-climbing speeds, and, of course, shedding weight helps fuel economy, too. Li-ion batteries weigh about 70 percent less than batteries containing lead, and although it won't make a huge difference on a heavy vehicle, every little bit counts.

Li-ion batteries generally have very high CCA outputs compared to OEM wet-cell batteries but have relatively low Ah capacities. They also are more sensitive to low and high temperature, and in some cases can experience destructive thermal runaway. If you typically operate in temperature extremes or run a lot of electrical accessories that draw from the battery when the engine is off, a Li-ion battery may not be best for your application.

Lithionics offers its NeverDie system with low-voltage cut-off circuitry internal to the battery case.

Special chargers, such as this 1200 model from Optima, are recommended for AGM batteries.

This system places an unused Li-ion battery into sleep mode, with reserve energy preserved to provide two to three restarts after the battery is reactivated. Lithionics also offers remote-control interfaces to wake the battery up. This is handy for storage and theft deterrence.

Storage and Charging

Different types of batteries have different charging characteristics and needs. All batteries work best in moderate temperatures, with performance and output dropping off at both high- and low-temperature extremes. Many high-quality modern battery chargers now have built-in features to charge AGM and gel batteries. Under normal operating conditions, most regular automatic lead-acid battery chargers can be used to recharge an



AGM or gel battery.

Gel float-charging voltage should be 13.5 to 13.8 volts, which is just slightly higher than wet cells; most chargers will work with them. Maximum charging voltage should be about 14.4 volts and shouldn't exceed 14.8 volts.

When stored for a long period, any type of battery will self-discharge. Leaving them discharged can result

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in loss of capacity, and if a battery's electrolyte freezes (due to being discharged), it can ruin the battery. Proper battery storage with a maintenance charger designed for the type of battery being used avoids problems.

Don't use a cheap "dumb" trickle charger on wet cell, AGM or gel cells for storage. Models that have a float, storage or maintenance charge mode are preferred. Brands such as the Deltran Battery Tender have "smart" circuitry to maintain the correct voltage and current, and keep the battery at the right level without overcharging.

For Li-ion batteries, most manufacturers, including Battery Tender, offer a special charger that is best to use. As long as the battery charger does not have a desulfation mode (equalization) and the peak voltage does not exceed 14.8 volts during the charge cycle, it can be used to charge a Li-ion battery.

Final Thoughts

Modern high-tech batteries offer a number of advantages over conventional models, as outlined above. Gel and AGM cells are closer in pricing to wet-cell batteries and can pay back the extra investment sooner. Li-ion batteries, being new to the market, are quite expensive and will likely be bought mostly by early adopters and folks with sophisticated solar systems. But as prices come down, expect them to become more mainstream.

On the horizon are new designs including a revolutionary battery being developed by Power Japan Plus: The Ryden dual-carbon battery promises high-performance and lower cost, as carbon is readily available and inexpensive.

The Ryden battery is energy-dense and, according to the manufacturer, charges 20 times faster than the best Li-ion battery available. The fast charge time could be a valuable asset for electric vehicles with shorter driving

ranges. The dual-carbon battery can be 100 percent discharged, further extending the length of each usable charge cycle, and it is more powerful than other advanced batteries. 🚗

Sources

Bosch USA

888-715-3616, www.boschautoparts.com/passenger-batteries

Deltran Battery Tender

877-456-7901 www.batterytender.com

Lifeline Batteries

909-599-7816, www.lifelinebatteries.com

Lithionics Battery

855-726-4204, www.lithionicsbattery.com

Odyssey Battery

800-538-3627, www.odysseybattery.com

Optima Batteries

888-867-8462, www.optimabatteries.com

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800-423-6569, www.trojanbattery.com

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- 224cc Champion OHV single cylinder, 4-stroke air-cooled engine
- IntelliGauge displays volts, frequency (Hz) and operating hours
- Cold Start Technology for reliable starts in cold weather
- Volt Guard technology over-voltage protection for appliances

- 3.4 gallon gasoline fuel tank
- 3.3' LPG hose with regulator included
- 8" dia. never-flat tires for easy mobility
- 68 dBA from 23'
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- Electric or recoil start
- Mfr. 2 year limited warranty
- Weight: 119 lbs.



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Champion 3100 Watt Inverter Generator

- 3100 starting watts, 2800 rated watts
- 5.5 HP 171cc OHV 4-stroke, single cylinder, air-cooled engine
- Low oil shut-off
- Push-to-reset circuit breakers
- CARB Compliant
- 1.6 gallon fuel tank
- Easy pull recoil start
- Sound level 58 dBA at 23'
- Weight 84 lbs.

Champion 3100W Inverter Cover



Champion 2000 Watt Inverter Generator

- 2000 starting watts, 1700 rated watts • CARB compliant
- Two 5-20R 120-volt/20-amp AC outlets
- 3.5 HP 80cc OHV 4-stroke, single cylinder, air-cooled engine
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- Overload protection
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- Weight 48 lbs.



Champion 2000W Inverter Parallel Kit
Connect two 2000W inverter models.

Champion 2000W Inverter Cover



4000W shown with wheel kit and cover

Champion 4000/3500 Watt Generator, 49 State

- 20-amp/120-volt duplex, 30-amp/120-volt twistlock, 30-amp/120-volt RV receptacles
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- Recoil start
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Champion 4000/3500 Watt Generator, CARB Compliant Model

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Four of a Kind

A quartet of simple products from Fastway makes trailer hitching more convenient

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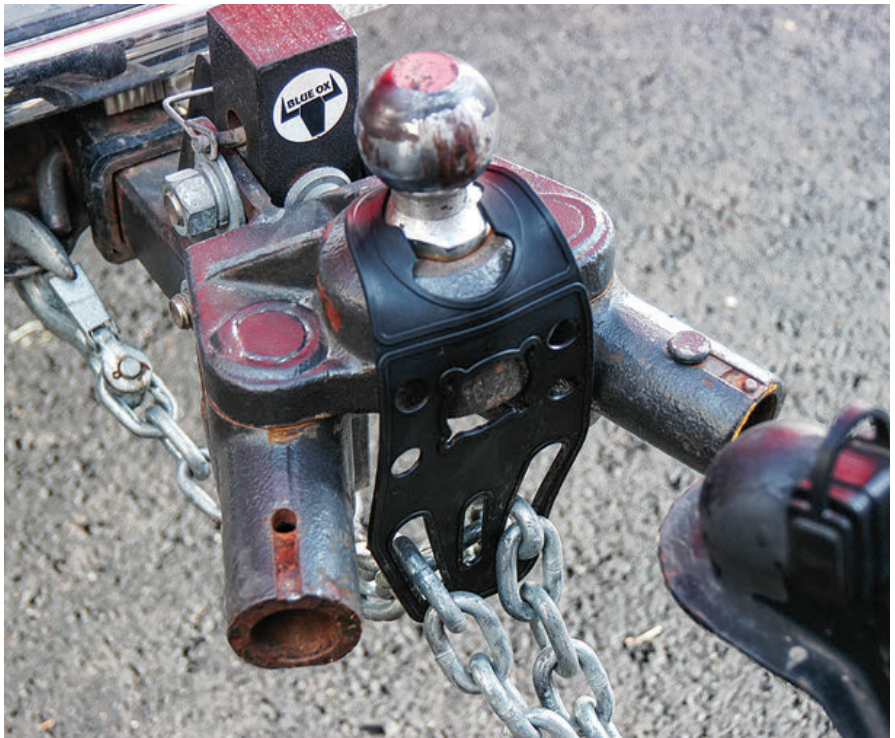
TOOLS NEEDED

NONE

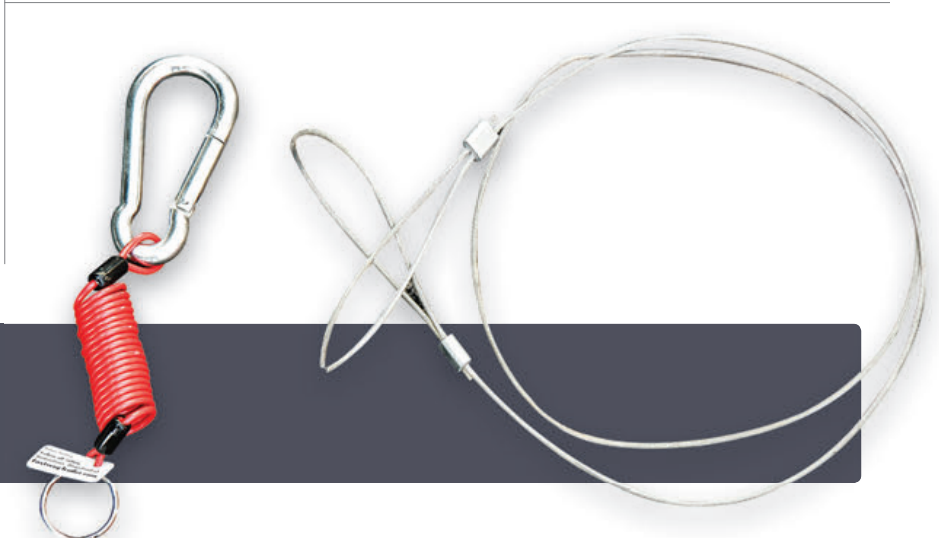
Typically, when you hear the phrase “four of a kind,” the reference is to a lucky hand of cards during a poker game. Although a friendly game of poker is a fun way to while away an evening in the RV park or when traveling to places like Reno, Las Vegas or Atlantic City, it’s definitely not our focus here. The four-of-a-kind items in this case are four Fastway products — all different in function but similar in that they tether to a ball mount or trailer A-frame for quick access.

Fastway has hit the target dead on for simplicity in design and purpose, offering much more convenience than expected for such inexpensive products. Two of the products, both called Chain-Up, are nearly identical in shape and style but designed for either weight-carrying or weight-distributing ball mounts. Intended to rest in place over an existing ball and hang the safety chains high and tidy, both versions are constructed of high-strength molded rubber.

The Chain-Up provides plenty of clearance for the ball when coupling, and the chains are fed through the appropriate oval loops, which allow them to cross over each other and be adjusted so that no portion of the chain hangs too low. Once the chains are positioned properly in the loops, they re-



The Chain-Up device easily slips over the hitch ball. Chains are threaded through loops that hang below the ball mount — preventing chains from hanging too low.



HITCHING ORGANIZATION »

Fastway’s Zip coiled breakaway cable (right) is easier to handle and control than standard braided wire (far right).



The Ball Cover slips over a greasy ball when unhitched from the trailer. When hooked up, the cover remains tethered to the mount.

mount retails for \$8.95, while the larger model runs \$9.95.

A perfect companion to the Chain-Up is the Ball Cover. The Ball Cover is made using the same strong high-grade rubber as the Chain-Up and is tethered when in or out of service. Finally, a cover for the ball that can't accidentally be left on the rear bumper of the tow vehicle or on the trailer somewhere while hitching up; it just hangs there until it's needed again. The Ball Cover will work on any kind of hitch configuration and is available for 2 or 2 $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch balls. Now you can throw away those old rags or aluminum foil called into service to keep grease from ruining your pants and messing up your hands. The Ball Cover retails for \$5.95 in either size.

The fourth item in Fastway's stable of towing-convenience products is the Zip, a loosely coiled cable that replaces

main in that position, so the next time the user hooks up, they are ready to go. When unhooked, the Chain-Up with the chains attached is removed from the ball and draped over the A-frame coupler, again out of the way and kept from dragging in the dirt.

The main difference between the

two is that the standard ball-mount style will fit correctly only over what it's meant for. The Chain-Up for weight-distribution mounts is physically larger and has two ball locations and four convenient holes for hooks (for hanging) when not in use. The Chain-Up for the weight-carrying ball

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the standard breakaway brake cable. By switching over to the Zip, fraying, dragging, breaking and even corroding are a thing of the past. The coiled Zip is entirely plastic coated, incorporates a key-chain-style ring for attaching to the breakaway switch plunger and utilizes a large, strong carabiner-style spring clip for hooking onto the tow vehicle's hitch-receiver loops, leaving little doubt that it is secure.

Of all four products reviewed here, the only one that really requires any kind of installation is the Zip. To get this job done, simply grab a set of side cutters or cable cutters and remove the original cable from the plastic plunger located inside the breakaway switch. Once this is cut off, swap over to the new keylike ring, and it's done.

A number of combinations are available for the Fastway Zip. If you



The Coiled Zip breakaway cable hangs neatly when not in use. To connect, the cable is stretched from the switch and attached to the tow vehicle with a carabiner-style spring clip.

need only the coiled cable, there are 4- and 6-foot versions. Both size cables can be purchased with a pin that goes into the switch or with a pin and switch. Prices range from \$12.49 to \$22.95. Anyone who has wrestled with attaching a breakaway cable will find the Fastway Zip refreshing. It can also be used on fifth-wheels and is especially needed to replace those cables that get hooked on the edges of the hitch in the bed and end up becoming pulled when making turns.

The above towing-convenience products by Fastway are all why-didn't-I-think-of-that items, and they all work as advertised. Sometimes products that are so basic are also effective, and Fastway's Chain-Up, Ball Cover and Zip all fill that bill. 🚚



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BEARING MAINTENANCE AND LIFT

Q We have a 2007 Keystone Montana with Dexter E-Z Lube axles that have approximately 40,000 miles on them. They're greased with high-quality lubricant and regularly checked for metal fibers. The owner's manual recommends yearly inspections of the bearings and seals. Is this really practiced by fifth-wheeler owners?

What is the proper procedure for lifting a fifth-wheel trailer?

Jim Chenowith, Deltaville, Virginia

A As you noted, Jim, the owner's manual calls for an annual bearing and seal inspection on axles equipped with E-Z Lube hubs. Even though you keep them well greased, it's not a bad idea, and cheap insurance, to do an annual look-see to verify that all's well with the bearings. This also gives you an opportunity to replace the seals, which can go bad and leak grease into the brake drum area. Some fifth-wheel owners don't do the annual in-



spections, and they're often called "tow-truck customers."

If by lifting the trailer, you mean raising the tires off the ground for safe access to the hubs and such for wheel work, your owner's manual will detail the procedure for your model. Lifting the trailer with a jack placed under the frame, not under an axle, and then adding a jack stand as a safety support must be done. Be sure the tires on the opposite side of the trailer are securely chocked so the unit can't roll. — **Jeff Johnston**

SLIDEOUT AND STORAGE

Q Is it better to store your trailer with the slide in or out?

Ray Barnett, Bronte, Texas

A I'd leave the slideouts in, Ray. Among other things, it saves wear and tear on the support structure, and with the slideouts in, the seals should do a better job of keeping moisture out of the trailer's interior. Apply a slideout seal treatment and mechanism lubricant before you put the unit away, and you should be in good shape. — **J.J.**

MEASURING TIRE TEMPERATURE

Q I have a tire-pressure monitoring system on my fifth-wheel trailer, and it also displays temperature. I'd like to know a safe operating temperature for a 205/75R14 tire. We have a future plan for a caravan that originates in Pahrump,

Nevada, and we'll travel there from north-east Pennsylvania.

David Witt, Long Pond, Pennsylvania

A I can't recommend a specific maximum tire temperature because that varies a great deal with ambient temperature, vehicle loading, vehicle speed and so on. In summer, with the pavement in the desert pushing 140 degrees Fahrenheit or more, the tires will naturally run hotter than a rainy day in Washington in the winter. The temperature-measuring feature of your TPMS is useful for comparing the relative temperatures of the tires. If three of them are running at 160 degrees and one is 195 degrees, that means something's happening, like low air pressure, that's causing that one tire to overheat, which can cause a failure. If you want to be absolutely sure, you can purchase an inexpensive handheld infrared thermometer, which will allow you to make

frequent and highly accurate checks on tire pressure (including individual sidewall and tread temperatures), as well as wheel-bearing and brake-drum temperature and the like, so it's a handy tool. In short, keep tires inflated to the recommended cold-inflation pressure, don't overload them, and you won't need to worry about overheating. — **J.J.**

TRAILER BRAKE ANOMALY

Q Until recently, every facet of my truck and trailer brake system worked, as it should. Although the trailer brakes work fine when I depress the brake pedal in my truck, I have found that the breakaway switch on the trailer does not activate the brakes. Also, the trailer brakes do not come on when I try applying the brakes manually by using the built-in switch on the truck console. Could these two problems be related, or do you think these are two separate problems?

W.F. Prim, Mobile, Alabama

A You didn't include any technical, make, model or age details about your tow vehicle and trailer, so that's going to somewhat limit the scope of our answer.

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.

First, the easy one, though it also relates to the other question. The break-away switch is a simple on-off switch that activates when the plastic plug is pulled out. If it's not causing the brakes to fully apply due to the direct 12-volt DC current that the switch routes to the brakes, it means the switch is bad, not connected to the battery, the battery is dead or the wiring is defective. Test the switch for electrical function and inspect all of the related wiring connections. Those switches are often out in the open and subject to moisture-related failure as they age. We don't know the year of your trailer, so we can't pin down age as a possible cause.

The manual lever will apply only the maximum voltage as set by the gain-control adjustment. Fully applying the manual brake lever, with the brake-control gain set at 100 percent, sends the truck's full 12-volt DC power to the trailer's brakes. You would definitely feel that effect when the trailer brakes slam on full power. This emergency braking

voltage is carried by the same line that carries the brake-actuating voltage when you apply the truck brakes, and that activates the trailer brake controller. It's unlikely but possible that your manual brake control lever is malfunctioning. Start by checking the voltage at the truck's trailer plug receptacle. The lower-right connector, as you look into the receptacle, is the one to test. With the gain set at 100 percent of its adjustment range, have someone fully apply the manual lever while you observe the voltage reading with a multimeter. If the voltage doesn't spike to at least 12 volts, there's something wrong with the system.

I suspect your gain setting may be too low. When the tow vehicle brakes are applied, some drivers have a tough time determining how much of the perceived braking force is the tow vehicle and how much is the trailer. If your gain is too low, you'll feel braking, but it's mostly coming from the truck. When you activate the manual brake control

under the same circumstances, you won't feel much trailer braking. Check your owner's manual on brake-control adjustments, do the voltage test detailed above, and if in doubt, take the truck and trailer to a qualified RV service center for an examination and adjustment by a professional. — J.J.

FIFTH-WHEEL HITCH LIFESPAN

Q Is there any information or guidelines as to the useful age of a fifth-wheel hitch? The one I use is 10 years old, and I keep it well lubricated. I currently pull a 38-foot Bighorn by Heartland. The loaded trailer weighed in at 13,800 pounds for our last trip. The hitch is a 20,000-pound-capacity Reese. **Bill Terrill, Cartersville, Georgia**

A Unlike some rubber parts, such as tires, that can decompose with age or ultraviolet exposure, there's no set lifespan on a fifth-wheel hitch. You've kept it lubricated, and that's more than

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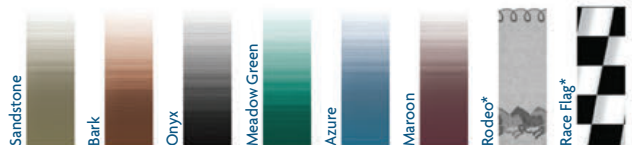
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half the battle for keeping a mechanism in good condition. There are wear points in the hitch that should be inspected now and then, so it wouldn't hurt to pressure-wash all of the moving parts once in a while so you can get a good close look at the mechanism. Take the truck and hitch to an RV service center, if you aren't comfortable performing this inspection yourself. This also gives you an excellent reason to repack all the parts with fresh grease, top to bottom, so the hitch can last another 10 years or more. — J.J.

TRUCK HEATS UP ON GRADES

Q We are looking for input on a problem we have with our 2006 Chevy Silverado diesel Duramax. About four years ago, we were pulling a long grade on Highway 395 in California with a 28-foot fifth-wheel in tow, and the truck heated up to the red line. At that point, I babied it to the top of the hill. I could find nothing wrong, but it continues to heat on a hard pull even in cool weather. We have changed the transmission fluid to Allison synthetic oil, and changed both thermostats and the fan hub. I am also using the tow mode, which helps, but I must be very careful since it does not eliminate the problem. It continues to heat the motor and transmission to the red line. I just have to back off of it.

We have already been to the dealership, with no explanation forthcoming. I am considering replacing the radiator and installing an aluminum aftermarket unit, but this is a very expensive proposition.

Ken Peterson, Corning, California

A Verify fan operation first. Although you changed the fan hub, do you hear the roar of the fan when it gets hot? The dash gauges are good quick-reference guides, but it might be useful to know what the actual temperature values are when these conditions occur, before spending a lot of money on parts.

Since you don't report having a boil-over, it may not be getting quite as hot as it appears. This temperature information is available from the diagnostic port of the vehicle (OBD-II connector lo-

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While every effort is made to maintain accuracy and completeness, last-minute changes may occasionally result in omissions or errors.

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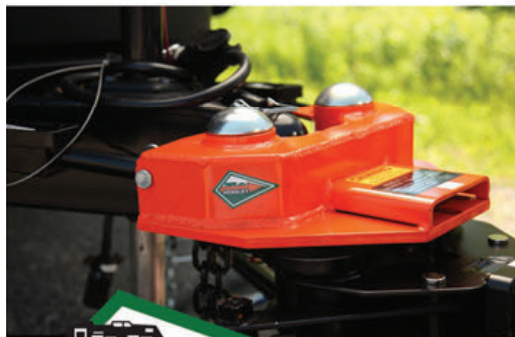
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cated near the driver's left knee). Some inexpensive diagnostic tools are available that plug into this port and will display the numeric temperature value that the sensors are reporting. The reason that this information may be useful is that you can determine whether or not the temperatures really are as critical as indicated by the dash gauge.

With a 50/50 mix of antifreeze and water and a good pressure cap, coolant temperature is safe to at least 230 degrees. With synthetic transmission fluid, temperatures of 250 degrees are not too disconcerting. Synthetic oils typically can withstand temperatures of 300 degrees for at least short periods of time.

If you are able to confirm the temperatures and they reach levels that you are not comfortable with, a new radiator may be the best consideration. There is an internal transmission heat exchanger in the radiator as well, so if your problem involves both of these systems, it very well could be that this is where the problem resides.

Your Chevy Silverado is old enough that component age can become a factor. Have you checked to see if the radiator cooling fins are blocked by a long-term accumulation of bugs and other debris? Spraying it out from the back side to push the debris out forward may help. Depending on the quality of the water used in your radiator, it could simply be blocked with mineral deposits inside. Have a competent radiator shop do an inspection and try a commercial-grade cooling system back-flush before you do anything seriously expensive like replacing the radiator. — **Ken Freund**

CRACKED PLASTIC

Q We own a 2004 Fleetwood Wilderness 285RLS Advantage. I bought it new, and it has been covered when not in use. I noticed a hairline crack in the seam at the end while waxing it about two years ago. I thought it was fiberglass but found out it was plastic. It got worse, so I took it to a professional RV center for repair. They said it was caused by the flexing created

when moving through resisting wind. I asked if they would reinforce under the cap when they repaired the crack. I was told that the repair would require welding the plastic. They charged \$1,500, and when repairs were made, it looked great, but a few months later a hairline crack reappeared at the same place. The RV center agreed to repair it but said it most likely would come back again. They also are going to require that I sign off so there will be no warranty. What say you?

Sonny Harvey, Cleveland, Tennessee

A Repairing cracks is always tricky and risky, because the forces that caused the crack in the first place are still there. The price you paid seems high, and before you agreed to the work, they should have provided you with some kind of written warranty on the job or a clear written disclaimer stating that the problem may happen again and there is no warranty. The panel may be replaced for not much more money.

Aircraft mechanics have a method of dealing with minor cracks that seems to work well. They drill a small hole at each end of the crack. You could have that done and then put some clear flexible sealant over the crack.

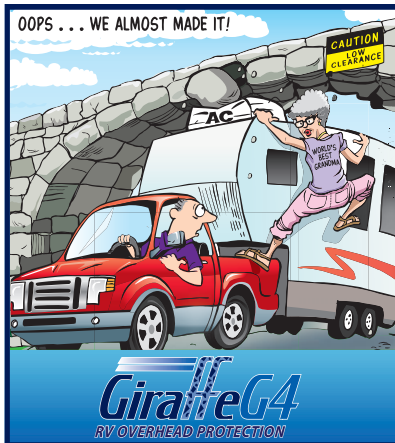
As far as the \$1,500 goes, you'll have to work that out with the shop. — **K.F.**

SLIDEOUTS...DON'T

Q I am looking for information for the slideouts on my fifth-wheel. Lately, when running, they kick the overload when running on the batteries. This just started, and I replaced the battery, and after that, I installed a second one (it came with just one). It is a 2012 Keystone Montana with five slides. Three are on the hydraulic system, and the other two have electric motors with mechanical drives.

Frank Guinan, Artesia, New Mexico

A This is a common problem these days with so many slideouts in use and many RVs getting older. If they work OK when the trailer is plugged in, it indicates that the motors (the



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hydraulic systems are also driven by electric motors connected to a hydraulic pump) are not getting enough voltage to operate against the loads under present conditions. This may be the result of the trailer being unlevel or perhaps twisted slightly on uneven ground, which increases the drag on the slideout mechanisms. Another common cause is dirt and crud on the slideout seals, along with dried-out

seals, which increases drag. Cleaning and lubing the seals often help. The tracks that the rooms slide on can also become dirty and corroded and may need attention.

Sometimes, corrosion of the wiring connections, often underneath where they are exposed to road splash from rain and puddles as the unit is towed, causes increasing resistance and results in a gradual voltage drop to the

motors. You'll need to inspect these items carefully to determine which it is. It's often useful to take voltage readings at various points in the circuit to see where and how much the voltage is dropping. — K.F.

WIND PRESSURE

Q I was thinking of a condition I have never heard discussed anywhere. When you put your hand out the window at 60 MPH, you instantly feel wind pressure of several pounds on your hand. Multiply the surface area of your hand by many times, as with the front of a trailer, and you get hundreds of pounds of pressure on the trailer. The hitch and tow vehicle act as a fulcrum, so the pressure on the front of the trailer is transferred to the trailer's tires. If the trailer is loaded to near its maximum weight limit, it would seem to me that the tires would be overloaded. What do you think?

Forrest Sauce, Morgan City, Louisiana

A There is considerable wind pressure on the front of the trailer. In fact, when you are driving on a flat highway, most of the power being delivered from the engine at the drive wheels is being used to counter this force. The remainder goes to frictional losses of tires and bearings, etc. However, this force is horizontal, not vertical. Most of the wind force acts on the upper portions of the trailer, since the lower parts are somewhat protected from the direct windblast by the tow vehicle. This wind force on the upper part of the trailer's front end may push down on the axles, using the hitch as a pivot point and the leverage pushing down on the axles, as you suggested, causing a few extra pounds to be on the tires. The amount of that downward pressure is negligible, which is why you never hear this topic discussed. — K.F. 🚚

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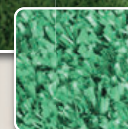
Harvest Gold



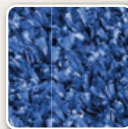
Stone Gray



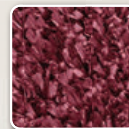
Brown



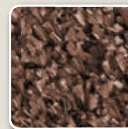
Green



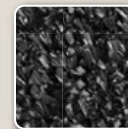
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I recently purchased a new travel trailer and needed a way to carry my 6-foot collapsible aluminum ladder (it folds down to 3½ x 4½ x 75 inches) without taking up space inside the trailer. At a local home-improvement center, I purchased an 8-foot-long section of vinyl fence post that's slightly wider in circumference than the folded-down ladder, plus two matching end caps. I secured one cap to one end with two aluminum screws. On the other end, I mounted a small brass hinge onto the cap so it can fold down and provide access to the inside of the fence post. For security, a small brass latch was attached to the top of the post to accept a small lock. The three screws in the cap have double nuts and are glued.

The vinyl post rests across the trailer's A-frame and is secured with two 16-inch cable ties (use black only). The post also works for holding fishing rods. By the way, the folding ladder can be purchased at Camping World.

Ray Breault, Manchester, New Jersey



Power Cord Cache

Every inch of a teardrop trailer is valuable real estate. I did not want to carry power cords in the tow vehicle, and the box on the front of my trailer is occupied by the air conditioner. My solution is a used computer bag from a thrift shop, which cost \$2. It has several pockets and room for power cords, a TV cable and several adapters, and stows just inside the teardrop's door. It's ready to deploy at any moment!

Bob Grant, Albuquerque, New Mexico

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QUICK FIX

Bubble-Wrap Window Insulation

An excellent insulator for RV windows is bubble wrap. Stick it to the inside of windows, and it will keep the cold out. (I don't know about keeping out the heat, as I have not tried it in a hot climate yet.) Get some clear ¼-inch bubble wrap in the biggest size you can find to fit the windows so you don't have too many seams. Using a spray bottle filled with water, cover the window you are going to insulate and apply the bubble wrap. Put the bubble side against the window and flatten out with your hand. That's it! You can measure the window first and cut the bubble wrap, or apply it to the window and then cut it with a razor knife.

This works great, and light still comes in during the day. If you're thinking of dual-pane windows for your next rig, try this first and then decide. To remove the bubble wrap, just pull it off.

Tim Bob, Amsterdam, New York. 🚐

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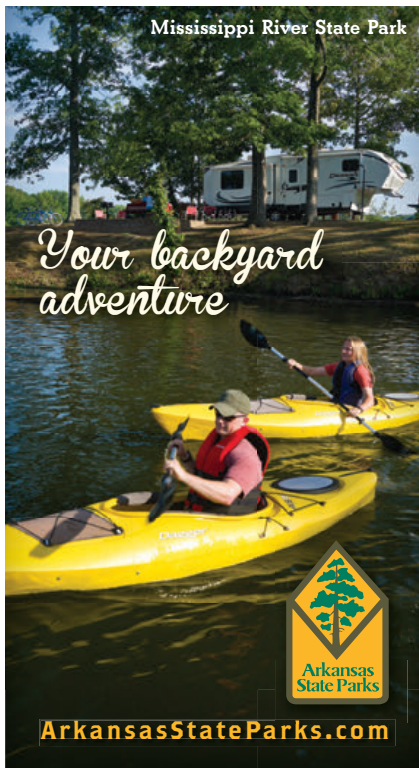


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Birthplace of Texas

Here on the Brazos River, settlers broke from Mexico with the signing of the new nation's Declaration of Independence



Texas takes up more of our country than all of New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois combined. In fact, it takes dawn almost an hour just to get across Texas. A third of the way across, between Houston and Austin, dawn breaks over a place called Washington-on-the-Brazos. This is where it all began for the Lone Star State.

It was here on the Brazos River on a cold morning in March of 1836 that 59 Texans gathered to declare their independence from Mexico. With hard-drivin', hard-drinkin' Sam Houston leading the way, they signed a Declaration of Independence creating the Republic of Texas. Nine years later, Texas joined the Union as our 28th state, making it the only state that was once a country. And with due respect to my Texan friends, I think most of them think it still is.

This snippet of history — combined with knowledge of the brutal wars they victoriously fought for independence — makes it easy to understand the homegrown pride that we see in native Texans. It's a personal thing, like a birthright that is not transferable. I think I could move to Texas, wear a big hat and call it home, but I would be a Texan in name only.

Another thing: Texans learn early, apparently at their mother's knee, that the words "sir" and "ma'am" are a show of respect and open doors for those who use them. Consequently, down here most everyone does.

This birthplace of the republic is now the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site. It's on 293 acres, 14 miles north of the town of Brenham. (As a side note, Brenham is also home to Blue Bell Creameries — *the* ice cream of Texas — with a country store, parlor and visitor center.) At the Brazos historic site, I sat in an austere replica of Independence Hall while a park ranger told the story to a group of tourists of how things went down here, almost 200 years ago.

Some delegates at that meeting wanted to expand Texas to the shores of the Pacific. Their opponents, led by Houston, eventually won out — the folks now in New Mexico, Arizona and Southern California would be living



(Top) A short path leads from Independence Hall near Brenham to the Brazos River. (Above) Local interpreters in period costume perform daily chores at the Barrington Living History Farm, including tending to the oxen teams.

in Texas. Considering that Texans to this day pay no state income tax, this is one California taxpayer who has an opinion as to who came out the losers on that deal....

Leaving Independence Hall, I walked the obligatory walk to the Brazos, in the footsteps, I was told, of Davy Crockett. At the nearby Barrington Living History Farm, circa 1850, I marveled at the stake-and-rider fence. The fence stands on crossed timbers that follow a zigzag line, giving the fence bull-proof integrity, with no postholes having to be dug.

This was the home of Anson Jones, last president of the republic. It fell to him to announce, "The Republic of Texas is no more," that bittersweet day in 1846 when statehood was granted. He then retired here with his family and five slaves.

Using period techniques, costumed interpreters today raise crops along with chickens, turkeys, cattle and hogs. Appropriately, two teams of oxen do the heavy lifting and hauling. A washboard and handmade wooden tubs in the backyard speak volumes on how daily chores got done.

Jones kept a daybook in which he chronicled the tasks and nature of work at the farm. With this as their guide, the interpreters conduct themselves as did the farm's original residents. The farm reflects the immaculate care and attention they pay to the smallest details of the period.

Their work, and that of others like them around the country, is a worthy cause — lest we as a people lose touch with our heritage.

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Fig. 1 Saturn



Fig. 3 Asteroid Gaspia



Fig. 5 Mercury

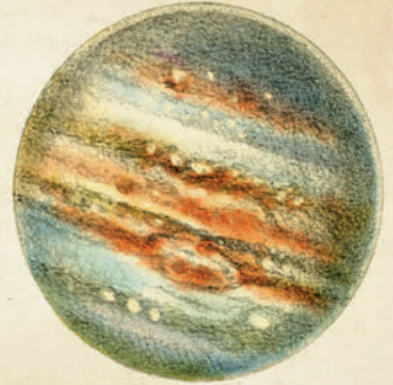


Fig. 7 Jupiter

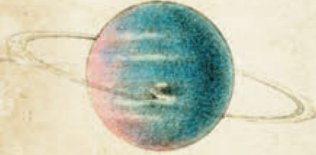


Fig. 2 Neptune

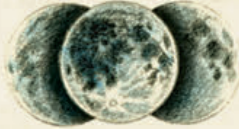


Fig. 4 Phases of the Moon



Fig. 6 Mars

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