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TOW VEHICLES ARE ON THE WAY

TRAILER LIFE

FOLLOW THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

MADE IN THE SHADE
16 SLIDE TOPPERS,
AWNINGS AND
ACCESSORIES
Page 38



TESTED

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BATTERY PACKED

Due out next year, Rivian's all-electric R1T will be rated to tow 11,000 pounds and can be equipped with a pullout kitchen. Page 42



Collectible RVs?

There's a lot of interest in restoring old travel trailers, and for some owners, they're collector's items rather than camping quarters

Over the past few years, restoring vintage RVs has been in vogue. In fact, younger generations have a particular fascination for mid-20th-century design, and many of these RVs fit into that trend nicely. There are even boutique campgrounds and B&Bs that feature iconic trailers retrofitted for onsite rentals by specialty RV restorers like Anna and Justin Scribner, owners of Flyte Camp vintage-trailer restorations in Bend, Oregon, and hosts of the *Flippin' RVs* TV show that ran from 2014 to 2016. In my travels I have seen many classic RVs on the road, some restored to rolling artwork. But do any of them rise to the level of being collectible?

High on the list of classic trailer brands are Airstream, Shasta, Terry and Serro Scotty, to name a few, but there are plenty of others.

RV historian and collector David Woodworth certainly thinks so. In 2005 he sold his wonderful collection of antique camping vehicles and RV paraphernalia to the RV/MH Hall of Fame and Museum in Elkhart, Indiana, a must-stop for RVers passing through and a mecca for RV geeks. Aside from that, I don't know of too many other substantial RV collections that are

open to the public, other than the Jack Sisemore RV Museum in Amarillo, Texas, and the Vintage Campers exhibit at the Volo Auto Museum in Volo, Illinois.

Now, there are certainly RV *collectibles* out there, including vintage toys, salt-and-pepper shakers, brochures and even Winnebago aftershave. Some of these antiques are worth a small fortune to those who relish various ephemera. A search on eBay comes up with an impressive selection.

So, I ask, what would constitute a collectible RV? A recent episode of *Antiques Roadshow* on PBS featured a Vietnam veteran who ordered a Rolex watch through the PX at the military base where he was stationed, only to find out that, after spending \$350 for it in 1974, he couldn't go diving with it, which was his intention. He put it in a safe-deposit box, where it remained, along with all of its documenta-

tion. In what was called an *Antiques Roadshow* "trifecta," the man learned that his \$350 Rolex is now worth between \$500,000 and \$700,000. He dropped to the ground.

High on the list of classic trailer brands are Airstream, Shasta, Terry and Serro Scotty, to name a few, but there are plenty of others, many

of which appeared in *Trailer Life* over the years. Then, of course, there are the retro-remakes that are being built today, some with the same names, that combine old-school looks with modern amenities.

Since the definition of a collectible is "an item worth collecting; of interest to a collector," I suppose any RV could fit that definition. What RV would you — or *do* you — collect? Let us know at info@trailerlife.com.

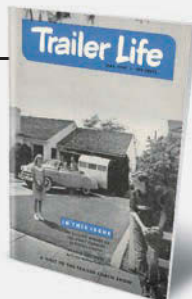
Until next time, we'll see you down the highway! 

— Chris Dougherty, Technical Editor



RV TIME CAPSULES

The first issue of this magazine appeared on newsstands in 1941 when brands like Airstream and Shasta were still startups. *Trailer Life's* early issues featured many long-gone names that now have classic appeal, among them Aero Flite, Airfloat, Airlight, Aladdin, Aljoa (later Aljo), Aloha, Alumacoach, American, Angelus, Aristocrat, Arrow, Avalair and Avion — and that's just the A list. Next year we'll take a nostalgic look back at some of these vintage gems in our yearlong celebration of *Trailer Life's* 80th anniversary.



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TRAILER LIFE

FOLLOW THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

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FUN
ON FILE

GOING PLACES

My husband, Kent, and I are in the process of selling our home and going full time in our 35-foot travel trailer. Our first trip will be to Canada and Alaska this summer, then to wherever the roads take us.

We just received our February 2020 *Trailer Life*, and both of us have already read it from cover to cover. Although we're from Arkansas, I still learned a few things from Lisa Ballard's "Adventures in Arkansas."

The travel articles are the first things I read in your magazine when it comes every month. I cut them out and save them in a file folder for our full-time adventures.

Mary Lane, Royal, Arkansas



HAVE A COMMENT?

Write to us at info@trailerlife.com or *Trailer Life*, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Please include your full name, city and state or province.



Ⓢ Fifth-Wheel Faux Pas

In February's "New RVs for 2020" section, you stated that the Mobile Suites 36RSB is the only two-axle model in DRV's lineup. Not true. DRV makes another 36, the 36RSSB, which I own, and several 38-series rigs are also two-axle setups.

Jim Ziebell, Watertown, Wisconsin

February's "New RVs for 2020" refers to the Cedar Creek Champagne 38ERD as a triple-axle fifth-wheel, but the photo shows tandem axles. Just FYI. Great mag. I am new to RVing and love the expertise and articles.

Randy Tano, Durango, Colorado



POLL RESULTS: BOOSTER CLUB

DO YOU RV WITH A CELLULAR SIGNAL BOOSTER, WI-FI EXTENDER OR HOTSPOT?

35% Yes **65% No** facebook.com/trailerlifemagazine

Kevin Stenholm: No, but I'm planning to this summer. I'm thinking of the new WiFi Ranger Converge system.

Lanette Caplan: Yes. As a small-business owner, I am never really on vacation. I have a hotspot to keep up with all the goings-on.

Thomas Warner: I use the weBoost Connect RV 65. It boosts one bar to two or three — good for streaming. Not cheap, but it works great.

Bob McSpadden: I use my Verizon data plan and have good service most places. I do have a Wi-Fi booster, but boosting bad Wi-Fi is usually not useful.

Color Guard

Regarding "Silver and Gold," February's RV Makeover by Paul Lacitinola about his unique Airstream restoration, I was wondering if it is safe to paint the propane tanks any color other than white. I was at a propane filling station once when a lady came in with hers painted red, and they would not fill them because they could possibly heat up too much.

Bill Nelson, Prosser, Washington

Federal and state restrictions require that LP-gas cylinders be painted a light-reflecting color to reduce the absorption of heat. "In the vintage world, many people do paint their cylinders to go with the scheme of the trailer," says



Lacitinola, publisher of Vintage Camper Trailers, which ran an article on this topic in its January-February 2020 issue (www.vintagecampertrailers.com). The 1961 Airstream Lacitinola purchased came from the factory with gold-painted LP-gas cylinders, and he did an original restoration. — Editors

HELLO, DOLLY

About the same time that Bill Vanhook built his "Hitch Dolly" cart, featured in the September 2019 10-Minute Tech (www.trailerlife.com/tech/10-minute-tech/10-minute-tech-hitch-dolly), my wife and I were developing the RollinHitch (www.rollinhitch.com), which makes transporting, installing, retrieving and storing a weight-distributing hitch effortless. The patented hitch dolly carries all the pieces including the hitch, spring bars and sway brakes while incorporating a chain-tensioning tool into the collapsible handle. After building and selling them for a while, we've decided to get back to our retirement and are now looking for someone to take over the business.

Jim McConn, Fallbrook, California



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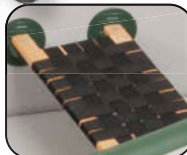
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LETTERS

What's the Scoop?

February's "Big Machine on the Kansas Prairie" by Therese Gundersen is a very nice article, but Big Brutus is an electric shovel and not a dragline. I worked for 17 years in an open-pit coal mine on both shovels and draglines. Our dragline wasn't as big as Big Brutus. It weighed only 9 million pounds.

Garlan Wilson, Newburgh, Indiana

Private Enterprise in Public Parks

Thanks for Chris Dougherty's January Driver's Seat column, "The Price of Our Parks." What an important topic for our nation in general and the camping public and others who use national parks for hiking and outdoor recreation.

The visionaries that created the setting aside of these great lands and waters, one of whom's likeness is portrayed on Mount Rushmore, knew that these lands were not consistent with the profit motive. That's one of the reasons the U.S. Army temporarily protected these lands from private exploitation before the National Park Service was formed.

The NPS is the group to take care of these lands, not someone trying to make a buck. As it says on the great arch on the north entrance to Yellowstone, "For the Benefit and Enjoyment of the People." This arch was dedicated by Teddy Roosevelt himself.

I surely agree that there is a place for private enterprise. Some campgrounds, grocery stores and the like can be really nice areas. NPS managers are best to determine the public and private balance, though, not politicians.

Dave Becker, Yankton, South Dakota

I agree that some balance between the NPS and private enterprise would best serve the national parks, but I am not sure the public interest is best served by the proffered proposals. Most of them would raise prices for access and create monopolies. For instance, the concessionaire at Grand Canyon National Park wants to own the trademark rights to the Grand Canyon.

Rob Powers, Ventura, California **TL**

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MICHIGAN'S UPPER PENINSULA

On the Shipwreck Coast

Standing guard on Lake Superior's treacherous southern shoreline, a vintage lighthouse towers above an illuminating maritime museum — by *Jamie Schmidt*

Few songs have honored a tragedy as respectfully and hauntingly as Gordon Lightfoot's "The Wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*." The somber lyrics and chilling slide guitar of Lightfoot's famed 1976 ballad propelled the final hours of the ill-fated Great Lakes freighter into legend.

On November 10, 1975, the SS *Edmund Fitzgerald* sank without a distress call during a severe storm on Lake Superior, about 17 miles from Whitefish Point. All 29 on board were lost. In 1995 divers recovered the ship's 200-pound bronze bell. It has since been restored and is displayed in a memorial to the crew at the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum at Whitefish Point.

Whitefish Point itself has a long and storied history. The cape on Michigan's Upper Peninsula demarks the entry point into Whitefish Bay where all ships

entering or leaving the largest of the Great Lakes must pass. This especially perilous region of Lake Superior has been called the Shipwreck Coast and the Graveyard of the Great Lakes. Vessels traveling through its waters are protected by the Whitefish Point Light, the oldest operating lighthouse on the big lake.

Active since 1848 and rebuilt in 1861, the lighthouse is part of a former U.S. Coast Guard Station. Its 44 acres are now divided between the museum, the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory and Seney National Wildlife Refuge in recognition of the area's significance as a migratory route for birds. Meanwhile, the 23 known shipwrecks in the bay are protected by the Whitefish Point Underwater Preserve for divers and

historians.

The Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum houses hundreds of marine artifacts in the restored Coast Guard buildings. Open daily from May through October, this fascinating museum and its surroundings will enchant ship lovers and bird lovers alike. Those feeling adventurous can even spend a night in the original Coast Guard crew quarters.

Each November 10 at 7 p.m., the museum hosts a memorial ceremony in remembrance of the *Edmund Fitzgerald* and her crew who were lost at that hour 45 years ago.

www.shipwreckmuseum.com

STAY AND PLAY

Twenty-two miles southwest of Whitefish Point, Tahquamenon Falls State Park accommodates RVs in three campgrounds and nearly 300 sites, many with electric hookups. www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails

↓ The bell of the *Edmund Fitzgerald* tolls for its captain and crew inside the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum at Whitefish Point. Exhibits tell the tales of vessels lost at sea.





↑ Taking wing at Pennsylvania's Hyner View State Park.

Top of the World

Flying high and lying low at two neighboring Pennsylvania parks

The Pennsylvania Wilds in the north-central part of the state encompass 2.1 million acres of public land including the 280,000-acre Sprout State Forest. Sitting within this jewel of natural beauty is Hyner View State Park, best known for its scenic overlook that takes in miles of the West Branch of the Susquehanna River, both up- and downstream, and the surrounding mountains and forests.

From the village of Hyner, a drive of 2 miles along Hyner Run Road and 5 miles up Hyner View Road takes sightseers to the viewpoint. Although the park is only 1,300 feet above the river, the scenery is spectacular. A large stone wall, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s,

borders the viewing area.

The small 6-acre park is a favorite launching spot for hang gliders and paragliders that lift off next to the viewing area and sail across the blue heavens like giant eagles in search of prey. It is a perfect place to feel like you are on the top of the world. Picnic tables, a small parking lot and restrooms are available.

Nearby Hyner Run State Park is surrounded by the Sprout State Forest. During the Depression, a CCC camp housed more than 300 men here. In 1958 the land was turned into a 180-acre state park, and the campground opened in 1975.

Wildlife abounds at the park, and the namesake stream that flows through the campground is stocked with brook and brown trout. Hiking trails, a swimming pool, nature programs and fishing keep campers busy. — *Kenneth W. Dahse*

☛ **IF YOU GO** With its rustic location and 30 campsites (21 with electric hookups), Pennsylvania's Hyner Run State Park is a peaceful destination offering a taste of the wilderness. The campground provides flush toilets and warm showers, and is open from April 3 through December 12 this year. Reservations can be made online or by calling 888-727-2757. www.stateparks.com/pa.html



What a Concept

On the drawing board for eight years, the futuristic-looking Romotow swiveling travel trailer is now ready to roll. Dreamed up by designers at W2 Architecture in Christchurch, New Zealand, the innovative RV features a cabin that spins 90 degrees within the outer shell to provide 290 square feet of living space. Despite its clever design and eye-catching looks, the Romotow is not for everyone. The starting price is north of \$250,000 (U.S. dollars), and then there's the small matter of overseas shipping. www.romotow.com

FOUR-LETTER RIGS

Three spunky bunkhouse trailers with one-syllable names

HIKE

A steel-tube exoskeleton surrounds Winnebago's new Hike H172BH, providing a climbable platform for mounting kayaks, paddleboards and other gear. Measuring just over 20 feet long and a trim 6½ feet wide, the single-axle trailer is lightweight and easy to tow yet still sleeps four on two bunks and a convertible U-shaped dinette. An axle-lift kit and 15-inch off-road tires help get the aptly named Hike into the wild. GVWR: 4,000 pounds. Base MSRP: \$29,373. www.winnebago.com



NASH

One of two bunkhouses in Northwood's 2020 travel trailer lineup, the single-slide Nash 24B extends 28 feet, 8 inches and is ready for rugged adventure with an off-road chassis, shocks at all four wheels, a 20-watt solar panel and generously sized holding tanks. There's a queen-size bed up front and double-over-double bunks in back, with the hinged bottom bunk flipping up to provide a sizable gear bay accessible through an exterior door. GVWR: 8,000 pounds. Base MSRP: \$33,027. www.northwoodmfg.com



VIBE

With overnight accommodations for 10, the 36½-foot Forest River Vibe 28BH has a claimed cargo-carrying capacity of 3,132 pounds to safely transport everything needed for a full house. In the single slideout, the sofa and dinette furnish comfortable seating by day and sleeping space by night. A sliding door provides privacy in the front bedroom, and another encloses the back room with three bunks and a couple of folding futons that double as chairs. GVWR: 9,770 pounds. Base MSRP: \$37,280. www.forestriverinc.com



KIWI
RV

Strings Attached

An Airstream hits all the right notes with a musical family of 12

Ten kids, two adults and a bevy of instruments — that's what you'll see when you peek into the de la Mottes' Airstream. Since 2016, the California family of 12 has packed into their trailer to see the country, make memories and play music to appreciative audiences as de la Motte Strings.

"The kids started with violin and cello lessons when they were young, and they just took off with it," says Amber de la Motte, the family matriarch.

Today, all but two of the 10 kids perform in the family's string ensemble.

Chances are, the one- and three-year-olds will join their siblings in the future.

The de la Mottes play everywhere from street corners to weddings, corporate events and churches. They've plied their trade as far away as New Orleans, and nearly every weekend during the school year they make the trek from their home in San Diego to the Bay Area, where the five oldest children are enrolled in the exclusive San Francisco Conservatory of Music.



"It's hard to find a trailer that sleeps our whole family," says de la Motte, but the Airstream Flying Cloud 30FB Bunk model does. She makes it work with air mattresses and shared beds for the younger kids: "Where there's a will, there's a way."

In addition to letting the family travel in comfort, the Airstream has brought them closer together. "It's really helped us bond like never before," de la Motte says.

— Amanda Prischak

☎ To keep up with the de la Motte family, go to www.delamottestrings.com and follow them on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

MORE ONLINE

For more RV news you can use, check out our website, www.trailerlife.com

DO'S AND DON'TS

If you missed Stephanie and Jeremy Puglisi's tips on buying and taking ownership of a new RV, the three-part series is posted online ("Meet Your Match").



BEAN SPROUT ☎

Bruce W. Smith reviews the Classic Bean Roadster, a Utah-built teardrop that's compact, comfortable and solidly constructed with a one-piece fiberglass shell ("Tiny Trailer").

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- Interior Command Center / Rota-Flex Suspension Pin Box
- Diamond Plate Bumper Wrap / Omni-Directional TV Antenna
- Exterior Convenience Center / Entry Door Friction Hinge
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- 13.5m BTU Air Conditioner w/ Condensation-Resistant Ducting
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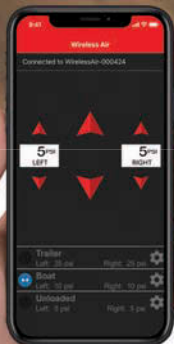
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Freshwater Cap.....	42 gal.
Black-Water Cap.....	30.5 gal.
Gray-Water Cap. (2).....	61 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.....	10 gal.
UVW.....	6,400 lbs.
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GVWR.....	7,600 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$38,973

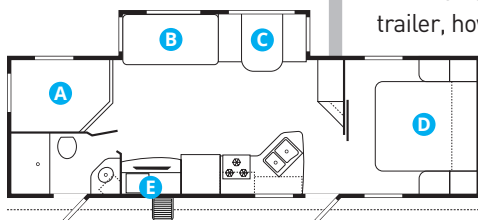
Apply the word “lightweight” to an RV, and listeners could conjure up a dozen assumptions. They might picture a bare-bones shell with few niceties. Or they may figure that ideal is beyond them, especially if they’re bringing kids — not an unreasonable leap for anyone who’s hauled a child’s car seat, folding playpen and 50-pound bag worthy of a weeklong hike in the Yukon, all for one night of babysitting.

The 2020 Jay Feather 27BHB travel trailer, however, ladles out space, comfort and practicality, all while stepping rather daintily on the scale and wearing a modest

price tag. Replacing 2019’s 27BH, this single-slideout, midsize bunkhouse has a few upgrades and a lot of upside.

A walk-through clearly shows a handful of places where Jayco invested extra thought and effort into maximizing utility and enjoyment. Windows and awnings are as big as each space will allow, and Jayco carved out holes and doors wherever an empty space could be used rather than sitting idle, regardless of whether it’s small or oddly shaped. Even with those add-ons, the half-ton-towable 27BHB is still surprisingly affordable.

It’s visually pleasant inside and out, from the decor’s rich Bourbon Chocolate wood finish and white birch-bark accent walls to the clean, linear, monochromatic exterior graphics that match any tow vehicle. Check out the camp side and you’ll see a 21-foot lighted power awning over the standard exterior kitchen and two entry doors with foldout aluminum



A) 49x73" bunks B) jackknife sofa C) booth dinette D) 60x75" queen bed E) outside kitchen



Far left: The swivel-mount TV is comfortably visible from all living-area seats. Nice touches in the kitchen include a metal-mosaic backsplash, arched faucet with directional nozzle and a dinette-handly column of drawers. Left: A second entry door next to the exterior kitchen near the rear of the 27BHB provides convenient direct bathroom access.

steps. Those with revolving-door kids (and perhaps restless adults) may be prime candidates for an upgrade to extra-hardy MORryde treaded main-entry steps.

The dual-lit exterior camp kitchen offers a spice rack, paper-towel holder, cube fridge and a welcome square of countertop over the pullout stainless-steel grill option. New this year is an embossed metal base that's impervious to dew and condensation, an upgrade from wood or other rot-prone counter surfaces.

Inside is where the real fun of this layout comes into play. The rear door allows restless kids of all sizes to utilize the loo without tromping through the living area. The corner sink makes for a smooth pass-through. It's small but soundly made, and designed well with a mirrored medicine cabinet and outlet. A centered ceiling fan/vent is accompanied by a skylight in the shower, with a vinyl curtain in a tracked aluminum frame with six corner ledges inside. (We'd like to see raised edges to help shelf contents stay put.) It's seated in a mini tub that's just right for wee ones' baths, be they human or furry.

Next to the bathroom are the 49-by-73-inch rear bunk beds. They're functional and comfy, and we're fans of Jayco's fuzzy mattress covers. Each level has a curtained window, 120-volt AC outlet, rounded corner shelf and LED dome light, with a large privacy curtain over both. We're also big fans of the folding-bunk feature with open storage in the base. We hear some folks even use this for a puppy pen or litter boxes.

The streetside slideout houses the dinette, jackknife sofa (theater seating with heat and massage is an option) and night-shaded tinted windows along the length and sides. The booth dinette's 4-inch-thick cushions are Goldilocks-approved — not too hard, not too soft, but just right — and there's a power outlet and stable double-pedestal table.

A quick note here on sleeping capacity. The brochure's assertion of eight to nine is probably stretching it; sleepers on the cut-angle side of the "double" bunks would have to be pretty short, and one person would be more comfortable sleeping on the convertible dinette than two. Still, with multiple sleeping spots and the convertible sofa, there's some lodging flexibility.

An entertainment-center wall includes a swivel flat-screen TV covering hidden media shelves (a thumbs-up extra-mile feature) that pipes through a Bluetooth CD/DVD player with indoor/outdoor zone speakers. Adjacent is the kitchen's 6-cubic-foot, two-way refrigerator next to the oven and three-burner flush-mount range with hood, microwave, double sink and pop-up power pedestal. Storage is found in low and high cabinets, an adjustable-shelf pantry/closet and several drawers on residential-style ball-bearing drawer glides.

Through a sliding door to the front is a walk-around 60-by-75-inch short queen (and predictably too-firm) bed. It's



Above, from left: The pass-through bathroom at the rear of the trailer is a compact but highly functional and pleasant space. In the adjacent room, wide bunks over flip-up, walk-in storage are mindfully placed streetside for a little quiet-space buffer from campside activities (provided the neighbors are equally mindful).

topped with overhead cabinets and reading lights and flanked by mirrored "wardrobes" and side tables with outlets and handy cutouts to stash bedside miscellany. There's not much room for personal items here, making the rear-bunk storage not just helpful but necessary. Your sweaters might not all fit in the bedroom, but at least they'll be indoors.

Jayco hit a home run by converting a small corner inside the 27BHB's main entrance into one of my favorite features: a micro-mudroom. A bench-seat cabinet and two coat pegs are crowned by an overhead cabinet, a fantastic way to functionalize that space. I found myself designating the lower cabinets for flashlights and bug spray, which we could grab right from the door.

"Lightweight" here doesn't equate to spartan, like you've been throwing everything overboard before you get to Jonah. The 27BHB is built soundly and outfitted nicely. It could stand to be a bit beefier, as far as its 1,200-pound carrying capacity goes — especially since the numerous nooks and crannies provide a siren's song of overstuffing temptation and that 6,400-pound unloaded vehicle weight doesn't include water, propane or other cargo — but if you're traveling light on gear and deep in passengers, this Jay Feather may just tickle your fancy. **TL**

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Two-Way Stretch

A quantum leap from hybrids of a decade ago, the Rockwood Roo extends less than 25 feet in travel mode but opens up to provide additional living space

— by *Stephanie and Jeremy Puglisi*

The hybrid travel trailer has always been a logical upgrade for families that own pop-up campers. Also known as tent trailers, pop-ups provide natural light, cool breezes and panoramic views, but many owners end up craving a less complicated setup with more creature comforts. A hybrid allows you to keep some of the best features of a pop-up, like extending beds on the ends of the trailer, while gaining some of the more attractive parts of a conventional travel trailer. Most hybrids have full bathrooms, ample storage and fully functioning kitchens, and they deliver these basics at an affordable price while still being relatively compact and easy to tow.

Forest River's Rockwood division is betting big that potential hybrid owners want a whole lot more than utilitarian furniture, canvas bed ends and cool summer breezes. It suspects that a more discerning hybrid consumer wants huge TVs, heated theater seating, outdoor kitchens, aluminum-cage construction, frameless windows and options to equip their rigs for boondocking while still being suitable in nice RV parks. Rockwood's current lineup of Roo hybrids is attempting to



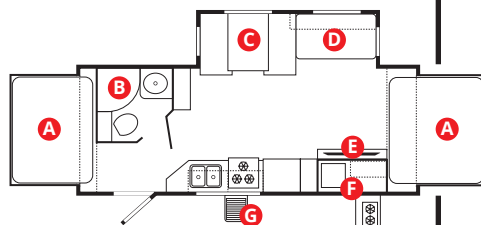
🔑 The large awning and camp kitchen make this Roo a great choice for families that love to cook and eat outdoors.

15,000-Btu ducted A/C. And third, almost every nook and cranny of this Roo's storage space has been thoughtfully implemented, inside and out of the RV.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Have you ever seen a hybrid with an outdoor kitchen? Neither had we. This Roo's camp kitchen is a game changer for the hybrid segment. It includes a 4-cubic-foot refrigerator, ample cabinet and counter space, a 120-volt AC outlet for additional appliances, and a two-burner stovetop on a swing-out arm that tucks away neatly when disengaged. Hybrid owners who love to cook outside will no longer need to carry out spices, condiments and grill tools. They all fit with room to spare.

We were also pleasantly surprised that this Roo comes standard with a 17-inch griddle as opposed to the typical grill or "RVQ." It mounts onto a sliding track on the bonded fiberglass side wall, but we would choose to get a dedicated stand for it, protecting the exterior walls. The standard Champagne exterior of this Roo is attractive and understated, so we



- A** 60x80" bed
- B** shower w/skylight
- C** 44" booth dinette
- D** optional heated theater seating
- E** entertainment center and fireplace
- F** outside kitchen
- G** track-mounted 17" gas griddle

would keep the bacon grease far away.

Another impressive exterior feature is that the automotive-grade KenCon Roto-Visc bunk latch and lock system was at shoulder level, and opened and closed easily. Many other hybrids place the locks too high for shorter people. We were also pleased to see an optional electric A-frame jack to help make setup and break down easier. Dexter's Torflex rubber torsion suspension promises a smoother ride, while the TST tire-pressure monitoring system will alert the driver if tire inflation needs to be adjusted. This system, which surprisingly comes standard with this Roo, does not attach at the valve but instead

The Roo 235S is fun and flexible, and ready for just about any kind of camping adventure thrown its way.

carve out and claim an entirely new market. Let's call it the "luxury hybrid" segment. This phrase might seem like an oxymoron, but after testing a well-equipped 2020 Rockwood Roo 235S, it makes perfect sense to us.

The Roo we tested has an MSRP of \$35,888.95 with the included options. While this seems hefty for a hybrid, after putting the trailer through its paces with our three young boys, we found the price to be more than justified for three major reasons. First, the Roo's impressive list of standard equipment, including its 43-inch LED TV and electric fireplace. Second, the options feel like must-haves, including the heated theater seating and upgraded



No one wishes for rainy days at the campground, but when they happen, the Roo's comfortable interior makes it a great place to share a meal or play a game of cards indoors.

IS "LUXURY HYBRID" AN OXYMORON? NOT FOR THIS ROO.



has internal sensors that wrap around the rim of the wheel.

On the street side, there are windows on all sides of the large 40-inch-deep slideout and an access door to the storage cubby beneath one of the booth dinette's seats. A black-tank flush and outdoor shower are also located on this side and come standard. The hookups for water, cable and electric were clustered together beneath the rear bed next to another exterior cargo door that is well placed for storing equipment like hoses and a surge protector.

THE GREAT INDOORS

After inspecting every inch of this Roo's exterior, our three boys were clamoring to get inside and check out the aforementioned TV, 5,000-Btu fireplace and heated theater seats with a massage feature. I think all five of us ended up on the entry steps at the same time as we turned the key and headed inside. Thankfully, the foldout StepAbove entry steps by MORryde were sturdy and stable. More commonly found on higher-priced towables, it's a real bragging point that these steps come standard.

Our boys ended up jumping into the theater seats well before we got there. After a bout of wrestling, they discovered that they could all fit together peacefully. A comfortable bench seat that runs along the edge of the front bed

HYBRID HEAVEN

Above: The Roo 235S has several high-end features that we have never seen in a hybrid, including a 43-inch LED TV, an electric fireplace and optional theater seating with heating and massage. **Right:** The kitchen is well-equipped and practical with ample storage.



functioned as overflow seating. Our youngest son quickly realized that he could lie down on the front bed and have a perfect view of the TV screen. Overall, there is plenty of comfortable seating for a larger family. One night we all enjoyed watching an X-Men movie together with plenty of room to spare.

At this point it is worth noting that the theater seats are going to cost an extra \$1,152.75. But would we check the box and order them if we were purchasing a 235S? For sure. This is supposed to be a luxury hybrid, after all. The



+ WHAT WE LIKED

Game-changing outdoor kitchen in this segment, spacious bathroom, thoughtful interior storage, luxurious for a hybrid

- WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE

Lock on bathroom door, upgraded toilet, more substantial theater-seating tray tables, Goodyear Endurance trailer tires

recliners are incredibly comfortable (like floating-on-a-cloud comfortable), and the massage and heating features are downright decadent.

A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING

While the boys tested the TV and fireplace (even though it was 95 degrees outside), we inspected the storage areas and unpacked. Every RV owner with kids knows that finding a place to store shoes is no small matter. We were thrilled to be able to kick off our shoes and store them in a well-placed shoe cubby underneath one of the pantries on the outside wall of the bathroom. A second storage area underneath the rear bed could also function as a shoe cubby. If you buy a 235S, your kids will have no excuse for leaving their shoes on the floor, but they'll probably do it anyway.

The aforementioned second pantry is smartly designed. The shelves can be removed so the pantry becomes a coat closet. We agreed that we would use it as a second pantry on longer summer trips when space for food is at a premium and as a closet for jackets in the fall when trips are shorter and the weather is cooler.

As we unpacked, we found other smart storage solutions throughout the trailer. Both beds came with overhead hanging cargo nets that worked perfectly for storing packing cubes, which we use instead of suitcases. There is also access to the middle of the exterior pass-through storage compartment right under the front bed. The center of pass-through storage compartments is often hard to reach from the outside and ends up being underutilized. However, in the 235S the middle of the pass-through compartment can be used for extra blankets, sporting equipment or clothing.

BUILT FOR FAMILY LIVING

After unpacking, it was time for dinner. It was raining lightly, so we deployed the 18-foot power awning and considered making dinner outside. But the Roo's interior seemed more inviting, so we decided to give the indoor kitchen a try. It was time for

Taco Tuesday! The kitchen area of this Roo is not splashy like its entertainment space. Instead it is convenient, well-equipped and practical. The three-burner gas range with glass stovetop cover, 22-inch Suburban gas oven and 8-cubic-foot Dometic refrigerator got the job done just fine. The solid-surface kitchen countertop is durable, and the double sink had room for all our dirty dishes.

The counter space to the right of the sink curves toward the door but still has ample room for a coffee maker and full-size Instant Pot. A 120-volt AC outlet located directly below this section of the counter made plugging in our appliances easy. Too many RVs have poorly placed outlets in the kitchen, so we always breathe a sigh of relief when they are thoughtfully placed. A charging station right below



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Far left: The Roo's bathroom is spacious and thoughtfully designed for a hybrid. We appreciated small touches like dedicated slots for toothbrushes on the shelf above the sink. Left: With a 4-cubic-foot fridge and a two-burner stovetop on a swing-out arm, the outdoor kitchen places this model in a hybrid category all its own.

this outlet included two USB ports and a 12-volt DC outlet. Charging devices on the kitchen countertop near the sink is not ideal, but we'll take USB ports wherever we can get them. The 235S also comes standard with the LTE-ready WiFi Ranger Sky4, which serves as a Wi-Fi router and booster. Rockwood has a useful quick-start video on its website for the technologically challenged.

All five of us were able to sit comfortably at the Roo's spacious aluminum-frame booth dinette with a removable tabletop. The theater seats come with two detachable tray tables. However, we found them to be small and unstable, and did not want to risk a spill. When you RV with a family of five, you see way too many of those.

You also see dozens of trips to the bathroom each day. So we were disappointed that the Roo's bathroom had no lock, particularly because it is almost directly across from the trailer's entry door. It may seem unlikely that one child would barge into the bathroom while another child was simultaneously opening the entry door, but it happened to us twice. Thankfully, installing a lock is an easy modification that we would take care of right away.

Despite a squeaky toilet seat, the spacious bathroom was comfortable and nicely configured. The large sink has a bit of counter space around it, and we loved the four toothbrush holders on the plastic shelf directly below the medicine cabinet. The three-shelf towel closet was also large and

easily accessed. The curved shower with raised skylight had plenty of headroom, and the hanging shower caddy was a nice touch for storing shampoo and conditioner.

SPECIFICATIONS

2020 ROCKWOOD ROO 235S

Exterior Length/Closed	24' 10"
Exterior Length/Open	29' 7"
Exterior Width	8'
Exterior Height with A/C	10' 10"
Interior Width	7' 10"
Interior Height	6' 8"
Construction	Steel I-beam frame.
	Aluminum-frame side walls, floor, roof. R-7/side wall, R-12/floor, R-14/ceiling insulation. Radius roof with interior-mounted ceiling. Vinyl-rubber composite roof membrane.
Freshwater Cap.	58 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	30 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	30 gal.
LP-Gas Cap	10 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	8 cu. ft.
Furnace	35,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	13,000 Btu (15,000 Btu optional)
Converter	55-amp
Batteries (2)	6-volt (dealer installed)
Tires	205/75R14 LRD
Suspension	Torsion axles
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no cargo)	5,993 lbs.
UVW	5,418 lbs.
Hitch Weight	725 lbs.
GAWR (2)	3,080 lbs.
GVWR	6,885 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	892 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$33,510.95
MSRP, As Tested	\$35,888.95
Warranty, Basic	1 year

Rockwood, Division of Forest River

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CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

We spent our time in the 235S at an RV park with full hookups, but this Roo could easily be equipped for short-term dry camping. The freshwater tank holds 58 gallons, while the black and gray tanks each hold 30 gallons. Fresh water is conserved with the Showermiser system by redirecting the initial blast of cold water back into the freshwater tank instead of sending it down the drain.

The double Maxxair vent-fan covers will keep cool air flowing through the rig at night when air-conditioning service is not available. This Roo is also prewired with Solar on the Side, which makes it compatible with any of Go Power's affordably priced portable solar kits. These kits would keep the house batteries charged and 12-volt DC lights and plugs functioning when 30-amp service is not available.

Traditionally, the hybrid has occupied a price point somewhere between a pop-up camper and a travel trailer, but that is not really the case with the 235S. It is firmly in the price range of a conventional travel trailer. So why would anyone buy a hybrid like this when they could get something bigger and fully enclosed for the same price? Because not everyone wants to go longer and heavier.

This Roo offers a length of almost 30 feet of living space when opened but is less than 25 feet long in travel mode. With a 6,885-pound gross vehicle weight rating, it is also towable by many pickup trucks and a range of properly equipped SUVs. It is small enough to maneuver in most state and national park campgrounds but luxurious enough to fit in at an elite RV resort. The 235S is fun and flexible, and ready for just about any kind of camping adventure thrown its way.

We were quite impressed by the Roo's standard features and optional upgrades, but its simplest feature might be the most compelling. Seasoned campers know that nothing beats falling asleep on a cool summer night with the canvas tent ends unzipped and a light breeze blowing through the RV. Though, we must confess, falling asleep in heated massage chairs with an electric fireplace on comes pretty darn close. **TV**

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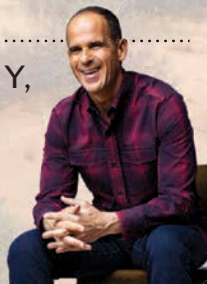
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Heavyweight Champ

— by Chris Hemer



With a tow rating of up to 37,000 pounds, two class-leading engines and a capable off-road package, Ford's full-size pickups aim to deliver a knockout punch to its competition

It's finally happened. All three U.S. truck manufacturers now offer models that can tow more than any production fifth-wheel weighs. In reality, that's been the case for several years now, but with the introduction of the 2020 Ford Super Duty, it was like a punch in the face. Up to 37,000 pounds with a gooseneck hitch and up to 32,500 pounds with a fifth-wheel. That leaves roughly 8,000 pounds of tow capacity surplus when pulling the average 40-plus-foot luxury fifth-wheel, loaded to capacity. That's just insane.

In truth, however, the Big Three aren't competing for RVers, as they represent a comparatively small percentage of overall heavy-duty truck sales. No, they're gunning for the commercial market, where more is always better. Consider how productivity

could increase, for example, if your truck (or trucks) could handle in two loads what used to require four. That idea alone could make the price of a new heavy-duty truck worthwhile to a business owner, even as diesel-model pricing can easily soar beyond \$80,000, depending on equipment and options.

These are not revelations to Ford, which has claimed commercial market supremacy for years. The numbers are quite compelling: In 2019 Ford sold 896,000 F-Series trucks, and it maintains a 60 to 70 percent market share in the oil and gas/construction segments, according to Tom Somerville, Ford Super Duty brand manager. With that in mind, and considering the legitimate challenges issued by GM and Ram with their own heavy-duty revamps, Ford knew that an update was necessary to keep its Super Duty trucks on top.

From an appearance standpoint, the updates are minimal but effective, making the new Super Duty immediately recognizable as a Ford but keeping the design fresh with new grilles/front fascia, new headlamps with increased LED output and nine new wheel designs (with the exception of base XL and dually models). The really good stuff, however, is underneath the truck's aluminum-alloy skin.

Upgraded Power Stroke Diesel

Having introduced an all-new Super Duty for 2017, with its now famous military-grade aluminum-alloy body and high-strength steel frame [see “Light-Heavyweight Champ” in the October 2016 issue], a complete teardown of the current platform wasn’t necessary to regain the crown, but more power and improved efficiency were.

According to David Ives, Ford’s diesel technical leader, there were four key areas in which the 6.7-liter Power Stroke was improved upon to achieve its class-leading 475 horsepower and 1,050 LB-FT of torque. “Previously, we had a 30,000-PSI fuel system, and we’ve increased that to 38,000 pounds, or about a 25 percent increase in operating pressure,” Ives said. “That operating pressure allows us to inject the fuel faster at full pressure to make more power and torque, and also to better atomize the fuel for greater efficiency at driving speeds and better tuning for emissions.”

More fuel requires additional airflow for complete combustion, which necessitated a new double-axle turbo design for the vane-control system. “Previously, we had an axle on one side and vane tab on the other,” Ives explained. “This double-axle design better supports the vanes, which allows for tighter vane side clearances. That improves the efficiency of the turbocharger, which translates into reduced fuel consumption and more torque and power for the customer.”

Often, when power is increased, the engine’s hard parts must be strengthened to cope with the additional stresses. In the case of the new Power Stroke, that meant a beefier block and cylinder heads, plus a big surprise: steel pistons.

“We sought out steel for its improved strength, and with steel being much less dense [thick] than aluminum, we were able to make the design much more compact,” said Ives. “So, the sides of the pistons [the skirts] are smaller, which creates

For someone new to the lifestyle, or for those who are uncomfortable with backing a trailer, the Ultimate Trailer Tow Camera System with the Pro Trailer Backup Assist package will be a welcome addition.

less sliding friction as the piston moves up and down the bore. The smaller size also means the connecting rod can be a little bit longer, so the thrust forces on the side of the bore are reduced, which again reduces friction.”

Finally, the new 6.7 gets a variable-displacement oil pump, which generates increased oil pressure when the engine is working hard, and reduces it during a normal drive cycle. Ives estimated that the engine’s improved efficiencies will result in about a 1 MPG gain in fuel economy over the outgoing engine for most customers.



ⓘ Super Duty trucks offer five Drive modes, plus a Rock Crawl mode when you opt for the Tremor package. To use Trailer Backup Assist, simply push the button in the center, then turn the knob the direction you want the trailer to go, as viewed from the sideview mirror(s).



New 7.3-Liter Gas V-8

Historically, the gap between the top gasoline engine and the available diesel has been a wide one, not just in price but in power. Consider that, up until this year, the next engine down from the Power Stroke was a 6.2-liter V-8, which makes 385 horsepower and 430 LB-FT of torque. Not bad, but it was a long way from the Power Stroke and would grow even more distant with the diesel’s 2020 upgrades. Rather than discontinue the 6.2, Ford adopted a “good, better, best” philosophy, offering the 6.2 as the base engine at one end, the 6.7 at the other and a brand-new 7.3-liter gas V-8 right in the middle.

Proving that there’s no replacement for displacement, the 7.3 churns out 430 horsepower at 5,500 RPM and 475 LB-FT of torque at 4,000 RPM on 87-octane pump gas. We had a chance to sample this engine in an F-350 King Ranch 4x4, and we can attest that it is a strong performer that sounds great, too. If you don’t want to step up to the diesel, the 7.3 is a worthwhile upgrade over the base 6.2, especially since you’ll also get the new 10-speed TorqShift automatic transmission, the same one that backs the Power Stroke.

Off-Road Tremor

Heavy-duty trucks have always been available with four-wheel drive, but with the exception of Ram’s Power Wagon, off-road packages were typically limited to different shocks and tires, a skid plate or two, and stickers that designated it as the off-road model. GMC took the concept one step further last year when it came forth with its Sierra AT4, followed this year by Ford and its Super Duty Tremor package.

Available on XLT, Lariat, King Ranch and Platinum F-250 and F-350 models, the Tremor starts with 35-inch Goodyear

Wrangler Duratrac tires — the largest hoops offered on a heavy-duty pickup — mounted on unique 18-inch matte-finish wheels. The suspension features a front-end lift (for a level ride height), progressive-rate springs and custom 1.7-inch-piston twin-tube dampers to soak up the rough stuff.

That's all most customers will ever really use, but the Tremor has the goods for more adventurous terrain, including Trail Control with a new Rock Crawl mode, a locking rear differential and a new Dana limited-slip front differential, plus 10.8 inches of ground clearance, which allows water *Ford-ing* (pun absolutely intended) of up to 33 inches.

Ford set up a pretty aggressive off-road course for us journalist types in the desert outside of Phoenix, complete with a rock-crawling course, a so-called Twist Ditch that tested suspension articulation, an uphill section that appeared nearly vertical, water crossings, muddy roads and more. The Trail Control system, which can help the driver navigate up-and-downhill sections without touching the brake or gas pedal, combined with a forward-camera view and 360-degree bird's-eye view (and assistance from copilot Bobby Keith, Ford's off-road and towing engineer), made us look like hardened off-road veterans (almost).

Towing Technologies

We can't really comment on how well these new Super Duty trucks tow their maximum-rated loads, because the

fifth-wheels on hand at the press event were less than 10,000 pounds, hardly a challenge for even a base F-250 model. Hauling an 8,190-pound fifth-wheel up a 6 percent grade at 50 MPH (the posted speed limit) with a Power Stroke-equipped F-350 dually was accomplished in sixth gear at about 1,600 RPM, and with the exhaust brake in automatic mode, we rarely had to touch the brake pedal on the way down. But as we mentioned at the beginning of this article, there are few trailers a truck like this won't be able to tow.

Perhaps more important, especially for those who are nervous about back-in sites, is the new Ultimate Trailer Tow Camera System with Pro Trailer Backup Assist, which is standard on King Ranch and above, and optional on XL, XLT and Lariat models. The camera aspect of the package, including Trailer Reverse Guidance (TRG), has been available on Super Duty trucks since the 2017 model, but it worked only with travel trailers, and the Pro Trailer Backup Assist feature is offered for the first time on Super Duty.

Instead of incorporating a "target sticker" that is applied to the A-frame of the travel trailer, TRG for fifth-wheels employs a yaw sensor that is mounted to the pin box via an adhesive backing. "We weren't able to use an image-based concept [target sticker] for trailer-angle detection on a fifth-wheel because there wasn't a surface that is consistent between different trailers," explained Don Mattern, Ford's trailer technology

Below, top: Ford's Trailer Reverse Guidance (TRG) system now works with fifth-wheels. The yaw sensor is applied to the pin box and learns the length of the trailer after a short drive and a few turns, according to Ford. The box has an adhesive backing and must be mounted to a flat, vertical surface with the arrows pointing up. Middle: TRG incorporates a power box with a seven-pin connector for the trailer brakes and lighting, as well as a 12-pin connector that powers the yaw sensor and other technologies like the camera system and trailer TPMS. Bottom: The Super Duty Tremor is prepped for a 12,000-pound Warn Winch, which can be installed by the dealer.



supervisor. The TRG kit comes with a fifth-wheel prep package, which also includes the necessary connections. "Once you have the sensor plugged in, it will learn the system — it's a three- to four-minute drive — you just make a few turns and drive straight," Mattern added.

TRG helps guide the user via the camera systems, while the center display depicts an overhead view of the truck and the angle of the trailer with

yellow and red zones on either side. As long as you keep the trailer between the yellow zones, the trailer is on a good path; once you get into the yellow, it may be difficult to change direction, and once you get into the red, you are in danger of jackknifing.

Pro Trailer Backup Assist, meanwhile, offers an alternative to backing up using the sideview mirrors, a process some newcomers find

confusing and counterintuitive. The system incorporates a knob on the dashboard; simply press the center of the knob to turn it on, let go of the steering wheel and turn the knob the direction you want the trailer to go.

Backing an F-350 and fifth-wheel trailer on a course set up by Ford, we found that the system works as designed; the only thing that took some getting used to was deciding when to let go of the knob and straighten the trailer. As experienced RVers, we would still prefer to use the steering wheel and mirrors, but for someone new to the lifestyle, or for those who are uncomfortable with backing a trailer, the Ultimate Trailer Tow Camera System with Pro Trailer Backup Assist package will be a welcome addition.

Another nice feature available on the Super Duty is the Adaptive Steering System, which has been augmented for 2020 to include Electronically Controlled Hydraulic Steering. This addition consists of a sensor and electric motor that modifies the torque going into the hydraulic steering system, which makes it possible for the Pro Trailer Backup Assist to move the steering system without the driver having to touch the wheel. It also makes the steering system speed sensitive, providing less steering effort at low speeds and increased effort at highway speeds for better road feel.

"Another advantage is that we can incorporate features with this system," Mattern said. "One that is already in place is called Pull Drift Compensation, so if you're getting a constant side wind, we can perform a torque offset because the system is looking at the yaw rate and noticing that the truck isn't turning, but the driver is putting in constant steering effort. So, the system will learn and adapt to that, and if the condition changes, it will adjust and say, 'I don't have to put that offset in anymore.'" In and of itself, this feature might make the option worthwhile to many RVers.

With more capabilities and even more features to make towing easier, the 2020 Ford Super Duty is a solid choice no matter what you plan to tow. Now, do we hear 40,000 pounds? **TL**

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GET THE DRIFT?

Despite its name, the ridges, valleys and rolling terrain of southwestern Wisconsin's Driftless Area are tailor-made for people who love to drift and explore

— by Terri Peterson Smith

HOUSE AND HILL IN HARMONY

Near the town of Spring Green, architect Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin estate tucks seamlessly into the rural landscape of Wisconsin's Driftless Area. Now a National Historic Landmark and UNESCO World Heritage Site, the main house sits on the brow of a hill, earning its name, which means "shining brow" in Welsh.

Ten thousand years ago, the Ice Age took a detour around southwestern Wisconsin and parts of three neighboring states. Without the glacial deposits of rock, clay, sand and silt called drift that flattened the rest of the upper Midwest, this region's winding back roads reveal picturesque limestone bluffs, spring-fed waterfalls, blue-ribbon trout streams and a rolling pastoral landscape — all nurturing iconic small towns, interesting people and acres of happy cows.

Located halfway between Chicago and Minneapolis, and encompassing roughly a quarter of the state, Wisconsin's Driftless Area packs in an eclectic blend of natural beauty, outdoor action and culture. The region's most famous citizen, architect Frank Lloyd Wright, built

his home and studio here, called Taliesin. "I meant to live, if I could, an unconventional life," Wright said. "I turned to this hill in the valley as my grandfather before me had turned to America — as a hope and haven."

But it's easy to overlook the Driftless. We've blasted by it countless times on the way to Chicago, Madison or Milwaukee from our home in Minneapolis, always thinking, "Gotta go there." So this time, foregoing the cities, we made the Driftless our destination, dipping south from Interstate 90 to explore the region at our own meandering pace.

PARKS AND REC

Our route followed State Highway 23 to Governor Dodge State Park, located between Spring Green and Dodgeville, which



we made our base camp for the trip. Named after General Henry Dodge, the first territorial governor of Wisconsin, the park contains more than 5,000 acres of idyllic natural beauty.

At Governor Dodge we hiked up cliffs, under waterfalls, over fields of grass and wildflowers and along spring-fed creeks where you can step into the cool air of the old spring houses that early settlers built as natural refrigerators. When we weren't feeling so ambitious, we cooled off in the park's two lakes, which have large picnic areas, fishing and boating (electric motors only).

The Dodgeville Kiwanis Club operates a concession stand at Cox Hollow Lake, offering boat and canoe rentals as well as treats such as pizza and king-size ice-cream cones at bargain prices. That lake also features a dog beach, just right for our golden retriever, Duffy, and other wet, furry, ball-chasing friends.

Owing to its unique geology and abundant rivers and streams — the Mississippi, Wisconsin, Kickapoo and Baraboo, to name a few — the Driftless region teems with recreational opportunities beyond the boundaries of its state parks. More than 40 percent of North America's migrating birds pass through the

area annually along the Mississippi River Flyway because of its abundant water and vegetation. Depending on the time of year, sandhill cranes and bald eagles nest on the riverbanks, while tundra swans and white pelicans stop in for a visit. Smaller species from orioles to ruby-throated hummingbirds make their home here, too.

Along the Driftless Area's northern edge is the 32½-mile Elroy-Sparta State Trail, a family-friendly three-tunnel bicycle route that has been inducted into the Rail-Trail Hall of Fame. To the south, cyclists may ride the 40-mile Military Ridge State Trail from Dodgeville all the way to Madison. Prefer paddling to pedaling? The many rivers flowing here make it a paddlers' heaven, and there are canoe and kayak liveries in Ontario, Rockton, La Farge, Readstown and Prairie du Chien, among others.

Finally, the Driftless area is known for thousands of miles of designated trout streams that *Outdoor Life* called "the best-kept secret in the trout world." And for fisherfolk who prefer boats to waders, area lakes and rivers offer walleye, smallmouth bass and northern pike as well as panfish, including bluegill, crappie and rock bass in abundance.



THE WRIGHT STUFF

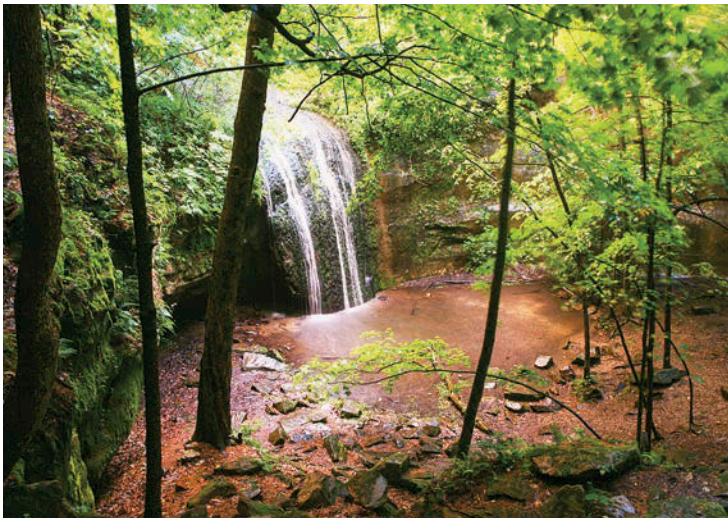
One reason the Driftless Area is so appealing is that visitors can weave a love of the outdoors with opportunities to enjoy the area's fascinating culture and history. Those things come together just outside Spring Green at Frank Lloyd Wright's 800-acre estate, Taliesin (Welsh for "shining brow").

As a child Wright spent summers in this valley on his uncle's farm where he witnessed the patterns and rhythms of nature. He incorporated his observations of nature's design into his philosophy of "organic architecture" maintaining that a building should be suited to its environment, purpose and time.

Wright's Prairie Style, so prominently displayed at Taliesin, is considered the first uniquely American architectural style. Wright expanded and refined those ideas in his studio and school for architecture here, concepts that continue to influence architecture around the world. That's why the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recently named it a World Heritage Site.

Taliesin can be entered only on guided tours that

Above: More than 14 miles of trails meander through Wyalusing State Park, some with serious climbs and all with scenic views. **Below left:** A short but steep trail at Governor Dodge State Park takes hikers to pretty Stephens Falls.



start from the visitor center and go by bus across the road to the estate. Strolling outside Wright's home, with dramatic horizontal lines and limestone construction that seems to rise straight from the land, it's easy to understand his thinking. A house, he said, should be "of the hill. Belonging to it. Hill and house should live together, each the happier for the other."

Inside, Wright's starkly simple interior spaces offer commanding views of the valley. The tours downplay it, but many stories from Wright's own life add to the drama of Taliesin. For example, in 1914, while Wright was away, a worker at the estate murdered seven people and set the house on fire. Read about it in Nancy Horan's somewhat fictionalized bestseller, *Loving Frank*.

OVER THE TOP

Not far from Taliesin but light years away from Wright's austere aesthetic, Alex Jordan built his House on the Rock atop a chimney-like rock formation. Leading his own "unconventional life," Jordan started building his dream house in 1945 and kept adding until it resembled, as one *Boston Globe* writer said, "the lair of a 1970s James Bond villain," a testament to over-the-



top excess.

Inside Jordan's home, opened to the public in 1960, you'll see his life's worth of collections including the world's largest indoor merry-go-round with 269 carousel animals and 182 chandeliers. Also on display are 200 model ships, a 200-foot-tall sea creature, hundreds of musical instruments, model airplanes, dolls and suits of armor. Don't miss the glassed-in Infinity Room that extends 218 feet over the valley floor. Kitsch or art, depending on your taste, it's like nothing you've ever seen.

From Taliesin or the House on the Rock, you'll want to swing into Spring Green, a great place to get supplies and artsy gifts, and to visit its excellent bookstore, Arcadia Books.

Above and below: Tours of Taliesin take visitors through the rooms, decks and courtyards that Frank Lloyd Wright designed to blend in with the natural surroundings of the Driftless Area.



WHERE TO STAY

A number of RV parks are located in Wisconsin's Driftless Area, including Fox Hill RV Park and Campground, a Good Sam Park in Baraboo, and several more in nearby Wisconsin Dells. The campground search tool on the Good Sam website can help locate them and other campgrounds, including state and municipal parks.

www.goodsam.com/campgrounds-rv-parks

Several Wisconsin state parks in the Driftless Area offer campgrounds that accommodate RVs, including Governor Dodge in Dodgeville, Perrot in Trempealeau, Wildcat Mountain in Ontario and Wyalusing in Bagley. Wisconsin state parks are busy in summer and during the fall leaf-peeping season, so be sure to make reservations well in advance. wisconsin.goingtocamp.com

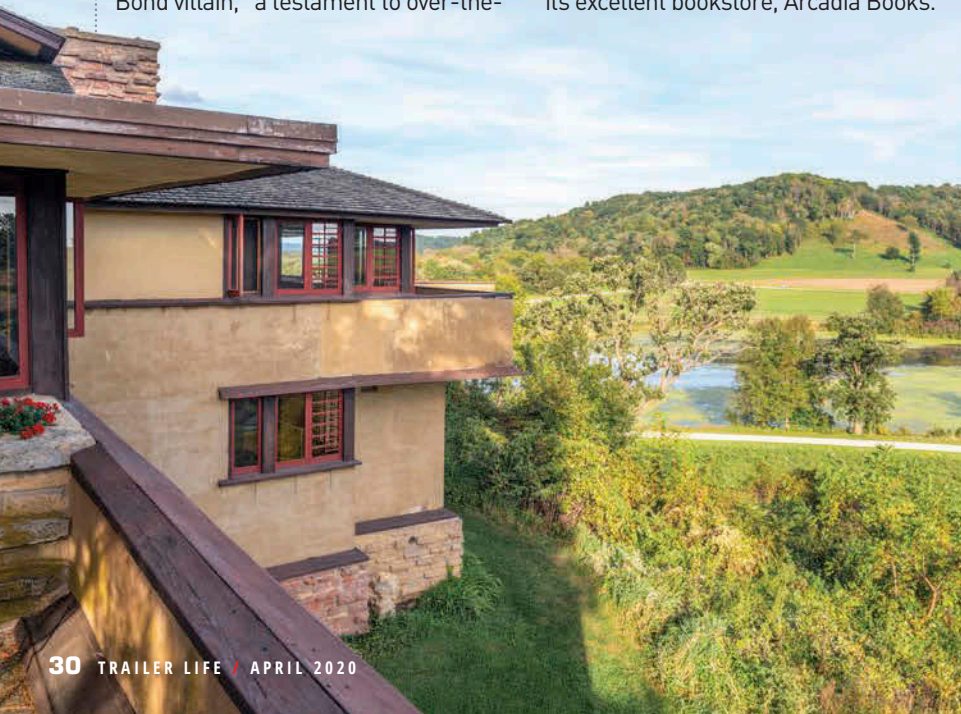
IF YOU GO

The Driftless Area makes a great getaway for every kind of traveler, even the family dog. Wisconsin state parks welcome well-behaved dogs on leashes, and Governor Dodge State Park has a special dog beach. Most bars and eateries allow leashed pets on their outdoor patios.

As with most of the Midwest, the Driftless Area can be humid and buggy in summer, so come prepared with insect repellent and a fan.

A TASTE OF SWITZERLAND

From Spring Green it's about 45 miles southwest to New Glarus, a bit of Switzerland transplanted to Wisconsin. Swiss immigrants came to the area in 1845 from the Canton of Glarus and settled here because they found the region similar to home, just without the Alps. You'll feel like yodeling when you see the town's Swiss-inspired brown-and-white architecture adorned with happy cow statues and window boxes filled with red geraniums. The



community displays its heritage to the fullest during its many festivals including the Wilhelm Tell Festival, Polkafest, the Heidi Folk Festival and, naturally, Oktoberfest. New Glarus celebrates its 175th anniversary in 2020 so expect even more festivity.

Even if lederhosen and polka dancing aren't your thing, you'll enjoy New Glarus' history on display at the Swiss Historical Village and Museum, a collection of 14 buildings where tours and exhibits trace the Swiss colony's growth into a prominent dairy-farming community. And if the way to your heart is through your tummy, you'll fall in love with New Glarus' authentic Swiss bakeries, butcher shops and restaurants. For our campsite dinner, we stocked up on cheese at the Edelweiss Cheese Shop, Swiss sausages at Ruef's Meat Market and an assortment of gorgeous l  ckerli, bratzeli and pfeffern  sse cookies from the historic New Glarus Bakery.

Wisconsin wouldn't be Wisconsin without breweries, and one of the state's best is the New Glarus Brewing Company on the south edge of town. We walked from the parking lot up to the brewery's hilltop site with beautiful views of the surrounding countryside from its rustic outdoor terraces. We sampled flights of Spotted Cow Ale, Two Women Lager and fruity beers that are their specialties.

ARTISANS AND ARTISTS

Without the layers of glacial rocks

and sand, the Driftless Area's lodes of lead, zinc and other minerals rested tantalizingly close to the surface, attracting miners from Cornwall, England, in the early 1800s to what is now the town of Mineral Point. The story goes that the first of these prospectors made shelters in makeshift hollows in the ground called badger holes, thus giving the state its nickname.

They didn't remain in badger holes long, however, because these miners brought with them expertise in stone building construction. Their sturdy and fireproof stone legacy remains the trademark of Mineral Point. The city was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation called the town one of America's Distinctive Destinations. Other Cornish legacies: the pasties (meat pies) and figgie hobbin (a cinnamon-and-raisin pastry concoction) you can savor at Mineral Point's Red Rooster Cafe.

Mining faded, leaving the historic buildings empty until 1935 when two foresighted gentlemen, Bob Neal and Edgar Hellum, began restoring a group of stone houses, now called Pendarvis, on Shake Rag Street. You can visit the historic buildings and then hike the trails on Merry Christmas Mine Hill to see remnants of mining equipment along with one of the largest restored prairies in southwestern Wisconsin.

Over the years, artists have continued Neal and Hellum's work, taking up residence in derelict buildings and turning them into art studios. Now, the 70-plus artists who reside in Mineral Point are delighted to show you their work and share their stories. In addition, anyone who wants to foster their creative side is welcome at Shake Rag Alley Center for the Arts where

Right, top to bottom: Near Wisconsin Dells in Baraboo, Fox Hill Campground offers full-hookup sites for all sizes of RVs. In New Glarus, Swiss Historical Village gives a peek into the lives of immigrants in a re-created 1850s Swiss settlement with a cheese factory, sausage shop, blacksmith forge and schoolhouse.



classes range from blacksmithing to fiber art, pottery, photography and much more. Even nonstudents are welcome to stroll Shake Rag Alley's collection of historic buildings and its oasis of trees and gorgeous gardens.

You'll find more of the Driftless Area's natural beauty and local culture along its scenic rural roads. Dozens of small family farms dot the landscape, seemingly plucked straight from a Norman Rockwell gallery, and many supply award-winning farm-to-table restaurants in Chicago, Minneapolis and Milwaukee. Amish buggies and Mennonite roadside stands with crafts and baked goods evoke a simple, local lifestyle. In the warmer months, music lovers can enjoy a variety of outdoor festivals, especially Larryfest, a terrific August celebration of bluegrass, folk and old-time music in LaFarge.

So what's the best way to enjoy the Driftless? Ironically, by just drifting through it. Meander. Stop and sample. Meet the locals. Transport yourself back to a simpler yet surprisingly rich time and place. And be thankful for those wonderfully fickle glaciers. **TV**



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Untouched by glaciers, the Driftless Area's sculpted topography covers southwestern Wisconsin as well as southeastern Minnesota, northeastern Iowa and northwestern Illinois. For those who like to imagine their destination before they go, several books give an accurate idea of the Driftless. David Rhodes' prizewinning novels, *Driftless* and *Jewelweed*, beautifully capture the people and the land of this region, and Nancy Horan's *Loving Frank* offers an account of Frank Lloyd Wright's life in Chicago and Wisconsin.

MOBILE BAY
ROAD TRIP

SOUTHERN CHARM

The coastal town of Mobile, Alabama, with its storied history and welcoming hospitality, is a playground for arts and culture, festivals, pre-Civil War sites, and exploration on land and sea

— by *Pamela Selbert*

My husband likes to joke that, “Like Johnny Cash, we’ve been everywhere.” Well, practically. A friend suggested that we might enjoy the great scenic drive around Alabama’s Mobile Bay, and that was something we’d never done, though we’d been to Mobile several times. We liked the idea and decided to make the horseshoe-shaped drive.

It’s under 90 miles, but that’s if you stick to the main route and don’t veer off to check out the many other area offerings. We spent 11 days at it, logging more than 400 miles, starting at Dauphin Island west of the inlet, continuing north to Mobile, then arcing south before the last stop at Gulf Shores on the inlet’s east side.

DAUPHIN ISLAND

We drove into Alabama from the west on Interstate 10, leaving the frenetic road near Grand Bay, and turned south on scenic State Route 188, which ends at Heron Bay. State Route 193 continues the scenic drive south, paralleling the churning gray-green waters of the bay to Dauphin Island Bridge. It’s a two-lane, 3-mile stretch with a 400-foot-long, 83-foot-high central main span that crosses





the Intracoastal Waterway onto the island. The huge dimensions allow ships 399 feet wide and 82 feet high to pass beneath. Noting that the bridge is intimidating on a high-wind day, such as when we crossed it, is an understatement.

Barrier-island Dauphin, 15 miles long and less than 2 miles wide, was a world of

barren gray-white sand dunes sprouting ragged seagrass and sugar-sand beaches when the first Europeans, Spanish explorers, arrived in the early 16th century.

Today, along the island's midsection, the grassy dunes are dotted liberally with beach homes colored like Easter eggs and perched high on stilts. But the road ends in a cul-de-sac, beyond which the island's western half looks much like it must have when Spaniard Alonso Álvarez de Pineda mapped it 500 years ago.

Tourist attractions are on the island's east end. Protected from thundering waves and erosion by rocky sea walls, they include the Dauphin Island Sea Lab and Estuarium, Dauphin Island Park and Beach, historic Fort Gaines and the 160-acre Audubon Bird Sanctuary.

We spent a morning at the first-rate Estuarium (the Sea Lab's public aquarium), which features 10,000 square feet of exhibit space, a living marsh and outdoor exhibits explaining that the Mobile Bay watershed covers some 43,690 square miles and includes parts of Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee and Alabama. The bay is an estuary, a coastal area where saltwater from the ocean mixes

with fresh water from rivers (six major rivers drain here), rainfall and upland runoff.

Several dozen aquariums of varying sizes hold such diverse creatures as spiny soft-shell turtles, southern flounder and "living fossil" sturgeons, plus hundreds of other creatures native to these waters. Other species represented are invasive, such as the island apple snail and striped Mozambique tilapia.

Another exhibit explains Alabama's role in saving the American alligator. It was the first state to ban hunting them, in 1938. In 1967 gators were listed as an endangered species, and two decades later had sufficiently recovered to be removed from the list. Hunting was reopened in 2006.

Elsewhere, there are photos of the unusual hexagonal-shaped Mobile Bay Lighthouse, 41 feet tall with spiderlike legs, that stands offshore in the middle of the bay. Lit in 1885, manned until 1916 and on the National Historic Register since 1975, it is unique among lighthouses.

FORT GAINES AND FORT MORGAN

Fort Gaines, named for War of 1812 hero General Edmund Gaines, is nearby. In 1819, work on building a fort on Dauphin Island's eastern tip began since the recent war had proven the need for better coastal defense. The project languished, original plans were scrapped, and the pentagonal masonry fort was still incomplete in January 1861 when Alabama militia took it over days before the state seceded from the Union. The same day, Confederates also seized Fort Morgan across the inlet. Facing each other across 5½ miles of water, the heavily gunned forts were a formidable duo protecting Mobile Bay.

Above, from left: Magnificent Bell-ingrath Gardens is just south of Mobile on the Bay. Fort Gaines on Dauphin Island, which guards the point and entrance to the bay, hosts events such as reunions and concerts.

PORT CITY HIGH POINTS
Downtown Mobile, looking north. The tallest building is the 745-foot RSA Battle House Tower. The other "needle" is the Renaissance Hotel. Both have boldly lit towers that are visible for more than 30 miles.



Both were still in Confederate hands in the summer of 1864, as Mobile remained one of the last ports open to blockade runners supplying the beleaguered Confederacy. Then in August, Union Rear Admiral David Farragut assembled a striking force of soldiers and ships, with a dangerous plan to enter the bay and seal off the port. He'd been warned the water was salted with torpedoes (mines), but ordered his flotilla to ignore them, and proceeded with the attack.

Farragut's fleet steamed past the forts, blasted with cannon fire till they were out of range (the exhibit describes a scene of "blood and fragmented body parts thick on the decks"). The USS *Tecumseh* hit a mine and sank, "causing the Union fleet to falter briefly." But Farragut drove them on, bellowing to his pilot: "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!" The naval battle that ensued, ending with a Union victory, was over within four hours.

Three days later Fort Gaines, under siege from land and sea, surrendered. Fort Morgan held out another 15 days. With the loss of the Confederate fleet and forts, the Mobile port was essentially shut down. But the town stubbornly refused to surrender till

three days after Lee had surrendered at Appomattox — nearly eight months later! The Battle of Mobile Bay may be just a memory, but Farragut's bold command lives on. Who hasn't heard it?

Fort Gaines and Fort Morgan are well-preserved state historic sites displaying several original cannons. Visitors can walk the grounds and ramparts. You cannot drive between the forts, but Mobile Bay Ferry Service connects the two via a 40-minute ride with frequent crossings.

SHRIMP FESTIVAL

While planning our trip, we learned that the four-day 48th-annual National Shrimp Festival would take place in Gulf Shores the second weekend in October, and "shouldn't be missed." (This year's 49th-annual festival takes place October 8 to 11.) Our trailer was too long for the ferry, so we left it at Dauphin Island Campground where we were staying, rode the Fort Morgan ferryboat across, then drove the 23 miles along Fort Morgan peninsula to Gulf Shores and the popular — and enormous — festival. Expect to pay many dollars to park, then walk.

Nearly 300 exhibitors in tents display every art and craft you can imagine. There's lots of food, including more than 10,000 pounds of shrimp cooked every possible way, live music, a sand-sculpture contest and much more.



STAY AND PLAY

When it's time to call it a day, the Mobile area offers a number of convenient RV destinations. Here's a sampling.

DAUPHIN ISLAND

Dauphin Island Park and Beach
dauphinisland.org/camping

GULF SHORES

Fort Morgan RV Park
www.fortmorganrvpark.com

MOBILE

All About Relaxing RV Park
www.allaboutrelaxingrv.com

MOBILE BAY

Gulf Shores Campground
Meaher State Park Campground
www.alapark.com

+ PLANNING YOUR TRIP

Mobile, on Alabama's Gulf Coast, has a 300-year history and knows how to party. Celebrating long-standing traditions like February's Mardi Gras, the city kicks up its heels with year-round events from art shows to concerts to festivals. Check out the Visit Mobile website before you go, then drop in at the welcome center inside the History Museum of Mobile once you arrive. The museum, located inside the old city hall building at 111 S. Royal Street, is well worth the \$10 admission fee. www.mobile.org



BELLINGRATH GARDENS

The next day we left Dauphin Island and drove the 15 miles north to 65-acre Bellingrath Gardens and Home just outside Theodore. The gardens, open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and closed on major holidays, are famous for their stunning azalea displays in March. But not to fear if you come at another time; a different spectacular planting is done each season.

The estate belonged to Walter Bellingrath, Mobile's first Coca-Cola bottler, and his wife, Bessie. They bought the property in 1917 and hired architect George Rogers to design the fountains, formal rose garden, conservatory and 15-room home. The 10,500-square-foot house, open for guided tours, is built of antique bricks and cast-iron galleries salvaged from historic Mobile buildings.

Mobile, one of the foremost ports on the Gulf, is home to the "Fast Battleship" *Alabama* that was built during World War II. A tour includes a unique visit inside one of her main turrets to view the inner workings of the big guns.



Top: Beautiful Meaher State Park campground sits on an island off Mobile. **Above:** Bouncing at the National Shrimp Festival. An amateur acrobat flies into the air in one of the many concessions on the beach at Gulf Shores.

Bessie's enormous collection of antiques is on display. She died in 1943, and her husband 12 years later. In 1956 the home and gardens opened to the public, managed by a foundation Walter had established to honor his wife.

Walking paths wind among ornamental trees and hedges, past flower beds lavish with color: purple Mexican petunias, orange zinnias, yellow lantana and many others. The conservatory is filled with tropical plants, and the rose garden displays 75 varieties in nearly as many colors.

MAGIC OF MOBILE

Our first stop in Mobile was at the elegant 1856 Italianate Old Southern Market and City Hall, which in 2001 became the Visit Mobile Welcome Center and History Museum. Affable Walter Calhoun at the welcome center explained: "To maintain its status as the oldest continually used city hall in the country, Mobile's city council still meets here once every year."

This museum is one of the best we've visited. Just inside is 18-foot-tall *Marianne*, a terra-cotta goddess of liberty who once topped the 1889 Mobile County Courthouse across the street.

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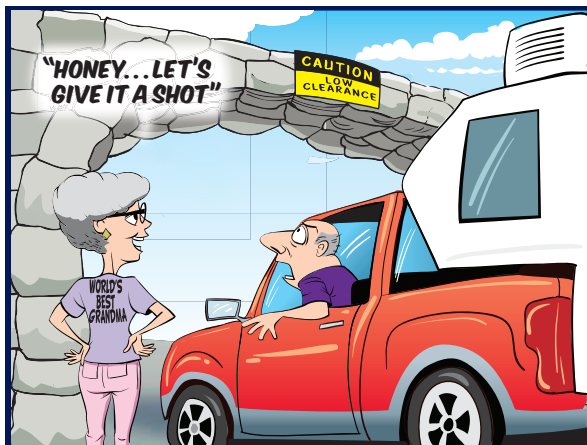
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TRAVEL SOUTHERN CHARM

According to one exhibit, human history began here around 10,500 BC. In remarkably good shape is a 20-foot-long cypress dugout canoe plucked from a sandbar north of Mobile by a father and son in 1976. It had been sculpted by Mississippians around AD 1320.

The museum's many exhibits are so varied and interestingly done, you could wander here for days learning about late-19th-century "conveyances," War Town Mobile and how World War II changed the city, the World of Cotton and the civil rights movement. Fans of Ken Burns' *The War* series will be pleased to see quotes from Eugene Sledge and the book *You'll Be Sor-ree!* by Sid Phillips, both U.S. Marine Corps heroes from Mobile.

On the sidewalk, *The Trumpeter* and other amusing statues represent the "sounds of Carnival." Mobile is known as "the birthplace of Mardi Gras." A sign explains that on Shrove Tuesday, February 25, 1868, the Order of Myths gathered here at Government and Royal streets at 8 p.m. to begin the very first Mardi Gras parade.

Nearby, at 149 Church Street, a small crumbling heap of mortared bricks is a vestige of the second Fort Condé, built by the French in 1723. The "foundations," such as they are, are "the only architectural remains of Colonial Mobile."

BATTLESHIP MEMORIAL PARK

We recommend allowing several hours for touring the "Mighty A" at USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park. Tours of the legendary 45,000-ton *Alabama* and her sister sub, *USS Drum*, are offered. The battleship served in the Atlantic and Pacific theaters during WWII, was decommissioned in 1947 and later consigned to the scrapyard. She was saved by the people of Alabama. More than two-dozen military aircraft are also displayed here, as are memorials to veterans' groups and service dogs.

GULF SHORES

Our last destination was Gulf Shores, 50 miles south of Mobile, on Fort Morgan Peninsula, also called Pleasure Island. The peninsula is severed from the mainland by the Intracoastal Waterway. It's a diverse world of wetlands, lakes,

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Sixty-five-hundred-acre Gulf State Park, where we camped, includes nine distinct ecosystems laced with 28 miles of hiking and biking trails. There's a bike-share program that's free unless you ride more than three consecutive hours. There's also fishing, boating, a dog park, a nature center and access to the beach. The campground is great, but watch out for the fire ants.

West off Fort Morgan Road is Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, with more than 7,000 acres of wilderness that is untouched but for 6 miles of trails. The refuge, with its unspoiled beaches and forests, is home to a host of animals from alligators, armadillos and squirrels to hundreds of bird species.

Sea turtles nest on the beaches in warm-weather months, and in spring and fall the peninsula is an important stopover for migratory birds and monarch butterflies. On our October visit, the beautiful monarchs seemed to be everywhere.

Bustling Gulf Shores also offers numerous shopping and dining opportunities. As RVers, we don't often eat "out." But here, with seafood the main event, we made some exceptions, and highly recommend the popular Fin & Fork. The restaurant can seat 300, and every seat was occupied the night we were there. The service was excellent, portions generous and the food — well, let's just say that I'm still talking about the tossed salad, pound of jumbo steamed shrimp with butter dipping sauce, amazing green beans and best whipped potatoes I've ever eaten. And all for \$22.

KAYAK TOUR

We ended our tour of Mobile Bay appropriately, with another outing on the water, this time on a three-hour guided WildNative Tours kayak "experience." With Kassey Trahanas as our knowledgeable guide, we launched on an inlet to the Bon Secour River, which flows into the bay.

Near the launch, a bottlenose dolphin appeared to be cavorting, smacking his tail on the water. We wondered if his antics might have been

for our amusement, but Trahanas said he was "kerplunking" — trying to stun fish he hoped to eat.

The kayak trips head south, under Oyster Bay Road Bridge, then west on the Intracoastal Waterway to Bon Secour Bay, passing the junglelike tangle of trees and vines that is the refuge. Guy and I had chosen a tandem kayak. Never again. Who knew that it was twice, not half, as hard to steer a

tandem as a single seater? But it was a gorgeous day, the translucent water a lovely glittering green. And though we didn't see manatees or alligators or any other dolphins, the air and trees were rife with birds, brown pelicans, cormorants and great blue herons.

All too soon it was over, the sun setting in a blaze of orange, and we were back at the launch, climbing out of the kayaks. **TV**

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MADE IN THE SHADE

AWNINGS, SLIDE TOPPERS AND ACCESSORIES HELP KEEP THINGS COOL ON THE PATIO AND INSIDE AN RV

Even though the interiors of RVs are great places to hang out, most people enjoy going outside to get some fresh air, socialize and take in the scenery. But sitting outside all day in the broiling sun isn't anyone's idea of a good time. That's why patio awnings are one of the most popular accessories for RVs. Think of your RV as a hat, and the awning as the brim that lets you enjoy being outdoors by shading your eyes and preventing a sunburned nose. Plus, with the proper awning, you can still enjoy the outdoors while staying dry on a rainy day.

Slide toppers are also like the brim of a hat, keeping debris and moisture from being dragged inside when the slide is retracted, and they offer an extra layer of protection from the elements.

Awnings

RV awnings are usually made of acrylic or vinyl. Acrylic is made from tightly woven synthetic strands. It's tough, so it can take the punishment meted out by debris, dirt, sunlight, wind and water, and come up smiling. It's water-repellent, and dries quickly, so a passing rain shower won't leave it sodden and dripping. It's also mold-, mildew-, UV- and fade-resistant. As a woven fabric, it breathes well. Its water repellency is a result of tension on the surface, so scrubbing the fabric while wet will result in some moisture penetration.

Dry brushing is often all the cleaning acrylic needs, but it can be cleaned with a mild detergent and spot-treated for stains. Because it's an upholstery fabric, acrylic is available in many colors and patterns, although many manufacturers limit the selection to a few. Acrylic is more expensive and more plush looking.

Vinyl is absolutely waterproof. It resists scratching and fading. Although it's mildew-resistant, rolling it up while it's still wet might result in some mold or mildew that shows the next time it's extended. Once mildew has grown into many vinyls, it can be difficult to remove.

Manufacturers will offer a standard-grade vinyl that is usually white with printing (stripes) on the top side only, glued to a heavier gauge vinyl weather protector that slides into the awning rail on the wall. They will also offer a higher-grade vinyl, which is a heavier gauge, printed on both sides. Often, aluminum or other premium weather shields are available, including a simulated "carbon-fiber"-type shield. Heavy-duty vinyl, offered by some manufacturers, is thicker and usually printed on both sides.

Variations of standard RV awnings include soft fabric and mesh walls that hang down from three sides to form an airy extra room — often called a screen room — on the side of your RV. Many awnings come with an option to add a screen room, which, with the addition of a patio mat, is great for outdoor dining and bug protection, or even sleeping.

In general, awnings are deployed in one of two ways: manually or electrically. The simplest models go up like a tent, with folding arms and legs, and are common on pop-up and truck campers. More expensive awnings, called box awnings or lateral-arm awnings, are deployed with a crank or electrically with 12-volt DC power.

Manual patio awnings are still available on many RVs (and are ubiquitous on legacy RVs), and consist of a roller tube with long arms that are mounted to the side wall of the RV. The awning is pulled out using an awning wand, and secondary arms are slid down the lower arm to secure the fabric. The awning height and tilt are then manually adjusted.

Awnings should be retracted in really bad weather, especially high winds and heavy rain. Some electric awnings are equipped with sensors that detect unfavorable conditions to retract it automatically, so you don't have to worry about the awning being damaged should a heavy wind kick up while you're away from your RV. If light rain is forecast, many awnings can be tilted into a rain-runoff position, although in extremely heavy rain, this may not be enough to prevent damage.

While anyone can operate an awning, installing one is another matter. Most require more than two people to install

and can have strong and dangerous springs that can cause injury. Electric awnings have the added complication of wiring, which makes the job one best left to professionals.

Replacing an existing awning with the same brand and model is relatively easy, but if you're switching brands or models, ensure that the existing mounting holes will work with the new awning, especially when it comes to installing the arms, which can vary in length across brands. With any replacement electric awning, make sure the new one has its connections in the same places as the old one and that your RV has the juice to raise it without tripping a circuit breaker.

Measuring instructions vary by brand; if in doubt, check the awning manufacturer's website or technical department. Most of the awning companies post installation instructions for viewing before diving into the project.

Slide Toppers

Slide-out toppers slide out over the room when de-

ployed. They collect dirt and leaves that would otherwise accumulate on the top of the slide room and be introduced into the interior when retracted. Without a slide topper, debris can be dragged inside, damaging seals and causing leaks. Slide toppers can shed much of the moisture when raining and help keep snow and ice off the slideout roof and out of the seals if the RV is used in snowy locations.

Another advantage of a slide topper is that the inside of the slide stays cooler in hot weather because it's covered and shaded.

Because toppers are exposed directly to sun, sap and other things, courtesy of Mother Nature, they take a beating and should be cleaned and checked for cracks or tears regularly. Lacking a solid support structure, toppers tend to flap in the wind, which can be annoying if you're stuck inside during bad weather and the incessant thumping noise overhead becomes intolerable. (See the March 2020 Hands On column regarding Ross RV Innovations' EZ Slide Topper

Support that pushes topper fabric into an uplifted, non-flapping state.)

As with awnings, replacement slide toppers should be measured according to the specific manufacturer's instructions, and installation will take more than one person.

Accessories

Awning accessories like lights, fans and speakers can be used with manual awnings with the addition of a power channel, or with electric ones through a power channel built into the awning. While kicking back in the cool night air, with music playing and illuminated by relaxing lighting, you just might find yourself as much at home outside your RV as in it. Just be sure that accessories are not left on when away from the RV. If the wind kicks up and the awning self-retracts, the accessories can damage the awning.

Following is a selection of some of the most popular awnings, slide toppers and awning accessories to protect you and your RV from the elements.



CAMCO

RV Awning Shades (\$125.99 to \$133.99 in sizes 54-by-120 inches and 54-by-180) are made with a mesh fabric that allows cooling airflow while preventing the "wind sail" effect. They're easy to install, according to Camco, will fit most RV awnings and are made of a UV- and weather-resistant material. When not in use, they retract like a curtain while still attached to the awning channel.

Camco's **RV Awning Gutter Kit** (\$133.99 for the 54-by-180-inch model) diverts water away from the sides of the awning. Easily attaching to either side of the awning tube, an included hose channels water up to 20 feet away. The adapter (also included) fits most awning brands.

www.camco.net



CAREFREE OF COLORADO

The **Alpine Slideout Cover** (above left) comes in vinyl (\$366 to \$800) and features the company's exclusive Billo-Stop inertia lock that automatically engages when the vinyl fabric starts to billow. The Alpine works on even the longest slide rooms — up to 32 feet — and has larger brackets for better stability and operation, eliminating the need for additional brackets for large slide rooms. It's available with black or white hardware and vinyl in 14 color choices.

The **Ascent Slide Topper** (above right) in vinyl (\$578 to \$1,733) or acrylic (\$630 to \$1,838) is styled to blend smoothly with the RV's side wall and comes with a weather slat that eliminates billowing. The improved pitch is said to provide better rain runoff, and when the slide is closed no fabric is exposed. According to the company, installation is simple, with integrated deflectors that mount directly to the room and align with the top of the room flange. The full cover is hinged for easy access for cleaning and servicing.



The **SOKIII Slide Topper** is available in acrylic (\$504 to \$788) or vinyl (\$452 to \$693) and needs no locks or additional anti-billowing devices. The roller tube and bracket assemblies are aluminum. It has greater mounting flexibility with brackets that can be tailored to fit a variety of flange and awning-rail configurations, according to Carefree. An optional front cover can be easily removed for cleaning and service.



Designed to be lightweight, the **Vacation'r Room** (\$999 to \$1,099) fits all brands of traditional and Carefree 12-volt DC awnings. It doesn't require poles or permanent fasteners to be attached to the RV. Screens can be covered by roll-down privacy panels. Stakes keep the panels secured to the ground, and tall skirting conceals the area under the RV, closing up the room. Available for 10- to 21-foot awnings.

www.carefreeofcolorado.com



The **BT12 Wireless Awning Control System** with auto retraction (\$149) converts a 12-volt DC Carefree awning to the Carefree Connects wireless control system, with a motion sensor that signals the awning to close automatically if it flaps in the wind. The wireless control module works with an included remote key fob or Apple or Android app, which also allow LED lighting control. The awning automatically extends and retracts with the push of a button, and a replacement power switch panel is included.

DOMETIC



The wall-mounted **9100 Power Awning** (\$802 to \$985) features one-touch operation. The durable, double-side vinyl or woven-acrylic fabric is easy to clean, and the rain-shed feature prevents water from pooling on the material. A vinyl or metal weather shield also protects the awning during travel. Awning fabric is available in multiple colors, and lengths range from 10 to 21 feet.



The **Deluxe Slide Topper** (\$241 to \$501) has a durable vinyl fabric as well as an aluminum or vinyl weather shield to help protect the awning from debris when it's rolled up. The fabric reflects light to help keep the RV's interior cool. Available in 60-inch to 198-inch lengths.



Dometic offers a variety of awning accessories including the **PowerChannel Floodlight** (\$55), which has a compact and waterproof metal/polycarbonate housing and an easy-fastening feature. The **PowerChannel Fan** (\$75.38) has a safety grille and adjustable-speed oscillating operation. The **PowerChannel Dual Speaker** (\$75.38) is Bluetooth enabled and, like other PowerChannel accessories, operates on 12-volt DC power.

www.dometic.com



LIPPERT

Fitting most 10- to 21-foot manual and power awnings, the **Solera Screen Room** (539.99 to 649.99) adds up to 160 square feet of enclosed space under the RV's awning. The mesh material comes in a neutral tan tone to block out heat while still allowing for a breeze, for dining alfresco without the bugs. The screen room accommodates RVs with an awning rail-to-ground measurement of up to 130 inches.

The **Solera Power Pack** fits right inside the 18-volt **Solera Universal Power Hardware Kit** (\$755.95) and comes with everything needed for connection to the motor wire, allowing the use of a 12-volt DC awning on an RV not wired for it. It extends and retracts quickly and operates 22 to 25 times before needing a simple plug-in recharge. The waterproof switch features one-touch operation, and the auto rain-dump feature activates when water pools in the canopy. A 120-volt AC charger kit is included.



The **Solera Awmbrella Fabric Support Kit** (\$107.95) keeps the material on an RV's awning taut with two adjustable aluminum tension bows. The rust-resistant bows are designed to lift the awning so water runs off and to improve clearance over the entry door. www.lci1.com



Solera Slide Toppers (\$306.95 to \$414.95) are supplied with awning rails and all mounting hardware. Both vinyl and acrylic models are available in multiple colors. The economical toppers fit many slideouts ranging from 66 to 192 inches wide and extending up to 42 inches. **TV**

WILL YOUR NEXT TOW VEHICLE BE **ELECTRIC**?

ELECTRIC AND PLUG-IN HYBRID TRUCKS AND SUVS ON THE WAY FROM FORD, GM, TESLA AND OTHERS COULD MAKE SURPRISINGLY CAPABLE TOW VEHICLES

— by Bill Siuru

SKATER STYLE

Instead of an internal-combustion engine, Rivian's flexible "skateboard" chassis houses the battery pack and suspension system on a compact platform.

After decades of promises, technology has matured to a point where electric vehicles (EV) and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEV) are reliable, environmentally friendly alternatives to their gasoline- and diesel-powered counterparts. Although the current EVs and PHEVs are still not the best tow vehicles, a few of them allow eco-conscious consumers to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, save money on fuel on their daily commute, and use the same vehicle to tow a lightweight trailer.

EV Tow Vehicles Not Ready for Prime Time

Pure EVs are currently still limited as tow vehicles for several reasons. First, there is the matter of how much energy can be stored in today's best batteries. The Tesla Model X Long Range has the most energy-storage capacity of any current EV — 95 kilowatt-hours of usable energy (100 kilowatt hours advertised). By comparison, the 23-gallon fuel tank in a Ford F-150 has the equivalent of about 750 kilowatt-hours of energy storage, depending on engine choice and fuel-tank capacity.

The Tesla can travel up to 328 miles, while the F-150 has a range of about 500 miles. A 2020 F-150 pulling a trailer reduces fuel mileage from about 22 MPG to 11 or 12 MPG, and range to around 250 to 260 miles, depending on the vehicle configuration and trailer weight. When pulling a 5,000-pound trailer with a Tesla X, this author's experience has shown that range drops by about 40 percent, or to about 100 miles, and that's not on hilly roads.

Only when 200- to 300-kilowatt-hour battery packs become available, which is now becoming the case, will an electric tow vehicle seriously compete with those with a gasoline or diesel engine. Even then, there would still be a weight and volume penalty. The Model X Long Range batteries weigh more than half a ton, so an EV would likely be penalized when it comes to gross combined weight rating (GCWR). The Tesla has a 4,960-pound towing capability, along with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 6,758 pounds and a GCWR of almost 12,000 pounds. By comparison, a Ford F-150 with the same GCWR can tow up to 7,500 pounds.

Still, it is clear that the Model X was built with towing in mind. It has a "trailer mode" that activates Trailer Sway Mitigation, where automatic braking of the vehicle's individual wheels can prevent a trailer from



Built in a former Mitsubishi factory in Normal, Illinois, the all-electric Rivian R1T pickup is planned to launch later this year.



Above, from left: Available as an EV or a fuel-cell vehicle, the Nikola Badger is expected to have a tow rating in the neighborhood of 8,000 pounds, while the Tesla Cybertruck will be capable of towing up to 14,000 pounds. Right: A Class 3 truck, the B2 from Bollinger Motors could tow as much as 7,500 pounds.



swaying dangerously. It also disables many of its driver-assistance features like automatic steering and parking, active cruise control and the rear parking sensors.

In general, EVs have gobs of torque for accelerating and hill climbing, since electric motors can produce maximum torque at zero RPM. You have probably seen ads with a Tesla pulling an airliner and a prototype electric Ford F-150 pulling a long string of freight cars.

New Electric Pickups Could Do the Job

Within the next few years, there could be a half-dozen electric pickups and SUVs with towing capability rivaling gasoline pickups.

Leading the way is the Tesla Cybertruck. Tesla says the top Tri Motor AWD model will be able to tow as much as 14,000 pounds and have a range of 500 miles. A base Single Motor RWD will tow 7,500 pounds with a 250-mile range, and a Dual Motor AWD will provide 10,000 pounds and 300 miles. Granted, those ranges are for driving solo, not towing, and have not been evaluated in the real world.

Next up is the Rivian R1T, which the company says will be available by the end of this year with 105-, 135- and 180-kilowatt-hour battery packs with estimated ranges of 230, 300 and 400 miles, respectively. All versions will have the ability to tow 11,000 pounds. While Rivian is a startup, it has some serious backing. Ford has invested heavily in it, and Lincoln's first EV will ride on Rivian's flexible "skateboard"

chassis. Amazon recently placed an order with Rivian for 100,000 electric delivery vans.

Rivian has shown a camper version of the R1T that includes a pullout kitchen. The electric double induction cooktop runs off the truck's main drive battery. In general, the EV battery could be used for campsite power, eliminating the need for a generator.

Another startup, Bollinger Motors, plans to offer its B1 electric SUV and B2 electric pickup later in 2020. They will have GVW ratings exceeding 10,000 pounds, making them Class 3 trucks. Range of both is estimated at 200 miles from a 120-kilowatt-hour battery pack. They could tow up to 7,500 pounds.

Ford plans to offer as many as 16 pure EVs by 2022, starting with the Mustang Mach E. This four-door SUV with a range of up to 300 miles will be offered in 2020 as a 2021 model. The Mustang SUV will be followed by an electric F-150 pickup, whose capabilities are still mostly unknown.

General Motors recently announced its all-electric pickup will be called the Hummer — yes, the Hummer is back. Initial reports don't provide range or towing capacity, but the latter should be

impressive since it is reported to have 1,000 horsepower and 11,500 LB-FT of torque. The new Hummer EV will be built in GM's Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly plant and sold through GMC dealerships. It should be available in 2021.

EV startup Lordstown Motors plans to offer its Endurance pickup in late 2020. Again, not much is known about the Endurance except that it will probably feature a four-wheel-drive "hub motor" system, have at least a 200-mile range and be capable of towing 6,000 pounds.

Nikola Motors, which has been developing fuel-cell electric vehicles (FCEV) and battery-electric semis, announced it will offer FCEV and EV Badger pickups later this year. While an FCEV pickup may not yet be a suitable RV tow vehicle because of the lack of a hydrogen-fueling infrastructure, a battery-electric Badger could be quite competitive. Nikola is planning to build hydrogen filling stations, but these will be mostly along well-traveled truck routes. Nikola is claiming a 300-mile range and around 8,000 pounds of towing capacity for the battery-electric Badger.

GREEN MACHINE

With an expected towing capacity of 6,000 pounds, the all-wheel-drive Lordstown Endurance electric pickup will have a starting price of \$52,500, according to the company, which took its name after purchasing a shuttered GM plant in Lordstown, Ohio.



What Can Current EVs Tow?

With the exception of the Tesla Model X, only a handful of EVs can tow an RV now, albeit a pop-up or very small trailer. Tesla offers a receiver for the Tesla 3, but it is available only in Europe. In the case of the Bolt, Chevrolet does not recommend towing.

BATTERY-ELECTRIC VEHICLES	TOWING CAPABILITY (POUNDS)	MSRP	ELECTRIC RANGE** (MILES)
Audi e-tron	4,000	\$74,800	204
Chevrolet Bolt	2,000*	\$36,620	259
Tesla Model 3	2,000*	\$35,000-\$56,990	220-325
Tesla Model X	5,000	\$81,000-\$138,000	237-328
Volvo Polestar 2	3,300	\$55,000	275

* Ratings established in Europe and Australia

** Not towing

PHEVs Are a Better Choice

Right now, if you want to tow an RV or other trailer with an earth-friendly vehicle, a PHEV is your best bet. In a PHEV, the battery, which has sufficient kilowatt hours of storage to provide enough range for daily commuting, is charged in the same manner as an EV. There is also a gasoline engine that provides extended range for longer trips that can include trailer towing.

It should be noted that PHEVs will have their greatest torque when both electric motor(s) and combustion engine are working together. Automakers often use a less-powerful engine in PHEVs than in the standard, non-PHEV version of the model. Thus, once the battery is depleted, only the less-powerful gasoline engine is available for towing.

PLUG-IN HYBRID VEHICLES	TOWING CAPABILITY (POUNDS)	MSRP	ELECTRIC RANGE (MILES)	TOTAL RANGE** (MILES)
BMW 330e	1,650*	\$48,000	20	N/A
BMW 530e xDrive	4,400*	\$56,200	21	350
BMW X5 xDrive 45e	7,700*	\$64,745	40 (est.)	N/A
BMW 745e xDrive	4,620*	\$95,550	16	290
Chrysler Pacifica Hybrid	3,600	\$40,245	32	520
Ford Escape PHEV	1,500	\$34,235	30	N/A
Lincoln Aviator Grand Touring	5,600	\$68,800	21	460
Mercedes-Benz S560e	7,500	\$109,750	19	510
Mercedes-Benz GLC 350e	3,500	\$51,900	10	350
Mini Cooper Countryman SE	3,300*	\$36,900	18	300
Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV	1,500	\$36,295	22	310
Porsche Cayenne E-Hybrid	7,700	\$86,400	13	450
Land Rover Range Rover PHEV	5,511	\$95,950	19	480
Land Rover Range Rover Sport PHEV	5,511	\$79,900	19	480
Subaru Crosstrek Hybrid	1,000	\$35,970	17	480
Toyota Prius Prime	1,600*	\$27,750	25	640
Volvo XC90 T8 eAWD	5,000	\$66,300	18	520
Volvo XC60 AWD T8 AWD	3,500	\$61,550	19	520

* Ratings established in Europe and Australia

** Not towing

PLUG-IN POWER

Charging-station access is not an issue for plug-in hybrids since they operate on an internal-combustion engine when the Li-ion battery is discharged. Batteries in conventional hybrids are charged by the engine and during braking, and they have very little or no electric-only range.

Pure electric vehicles are a different story. They can be charged with a standard 120-volt wall outlet, but this form of charging, referred to as Level 1, is the slowest method. As of May 2019, more than 68,800 Level 2 (240-volt) and Level 3 (DC fast-charging) stations were available in the United States. Of those, about 10,860 are dedicated Level 3 stations that make long-distance travel more practical for EVs.

With a Level 2 charger, it

typically takes about seven hours to recharge a battery to get 200 miles of range. This goes down to about an hour with a Level 3 fast-charger.

Chargers are not universal. While Level 2 chargers have universal charging capability so all EVs and PHEVs can use them, only certain Tesla models can use Tesla's V3 Supercharger's latest maximum 250-kilowatt capability, for instance.

A majority of charging stations are in California, Florida, Texas and New York, with only a few dozen in states like North and South Dakota, Wyoming and Montana. For this reason alone, a pure EV is probably not a wise choice for towing in less populated states. This undoubtedly will change as EVs become more popular.

What About Conventional Hybrids?

There are many hybrids for which manufacturers have issued tow ratings. In conventional hybrids, the battery is charged only by the combustion engine and regenerative braking. Since the batteries have much smaller storage capacity, hybrids have little or no ability to operate on electric power alone.

CONVENTIONAL HYBRID VEHICLES	TOWING CAPABILITY (POUNDS)	MSRP
Audi Q7	7,700	\$61,795
Audi Q8	7,700	\$69,195
Ford Escape FWD HEV	1,500	\$28,255
Ford Explorer HEV RWD	5,000	\$52,280
Honda CRV Hybrid	1,500	\$28,000 (est.)
Jeep Wrangler Unlimited 4WD	3,500	\$31,795
Land Rover Discovery MHEV	4,409	\$38,795
Lexus NX 300h AWD	3,850	\$39,070
Lexus RX 450h AWD	3,500	\$46,750
Mercedes-Benz GLE450 4matic	7,700	\$61,150
Ram 1500 HFE 2WD	7,730	\$34,450
Range Rover Evoque MHEV	3,306	\$47,595
Toyota Highlander Hybrid	2,500	\$38,200
Toyota RAV4 Hybrid	1,750	\$28,350

When considering any EV, PHEV or conventional hybrid as a tow vehicle, make sure the automaker approves its use for towing. Otherwise, towing might invalidate the warranty. Incidentally, many vehicles not approved for towing in North America (presumably for liability reasons) are approved in Europe, Australia and elsewhere. **TL**

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THE RV RIDER PLATFORM RACK TRANSPORTS TWO ELECTRIC BIKES SECURELY ON THE BACK OF FIFTH-WHEELS AND MOTORHOMES

A black metal mechanical device, likely a dental chair component, featuring a vertical column, a horizontal arm, and a base with wheels. The device is shown against a white background.

The rack mounts in a 2-inch hitch receiver, which will need to be installed if the trailer is not equipped with one. The receiver must have a minimum tongue weight rating of 350 pounds (Class III) to work with this rack, according to the company. If using the rack for nonelectric bikes, a standard trailer receiver may work, but you'll be rolling the dice.



the bikes. Setscrews are affixed to the end to keep them from sliding off the tubes. **7)** The keyed-alike frame clamps are installed and adjusted for the bikes. Be sure to completely loosen the clamps to prevent damage to the double posts. **8)** The completed rack installation has a locked frame bracket and the included locking security cable. The lithium-battery packs for the bikes have been removed and stored inside the RV, preventing theft and reducing weight.

9) The 3-inch-tire brackets affix in the same manner as the ones for fat tires. Because of the optional rear cap, the recessed hitch receiver created a clearance problem with the ladder and the wall. 10) To fix the clearance issue, a 7-inch-long 2-inch receiver extension with a matching 350-pound hitch and 3,500-pound gross trailer weight rating was called into service. We cut down the hitch bar on the rack slightly so the holes would line up for the threaded hitch pin. 11) The rack comes with one hitch tightener, which makes a big difference in the stability of the rack. If you use an extension, you'll need a second one, and they're available online.



Remember, it's the motion that adds G's to the assembly. It's unlikely you'll exceed the 350-pound rating, but the rack weighs 80 pounds, which needs to be subtracted from the published capability.

The RV Rider's wheel holders are tire-width specific, so it's important to know the width of the bike tires when ordering the rack. Choices include wheel holders to fit two bikes with up to 3-inch-wide tires, two bikes with up to 5-inch-wide wheels or one of each.

Assembling the rack is pretty straightforward. It comes with two hitch tubes — one allows the rack to fold down, and the other is rigid, which is used for fifth-wheels. Before mounting the rack on a 2020 Keystone Montana fifth-wheel, which has a molded rear cap, a heavy-duty 2-inch receiver extension was needed for clearance. In this case, the receiver did not extend far enough beyond the cap, which positioned the rack too close and interfered with the ladder.

Operationally, the rack's wheel holders and padded, locking bike-frame clamps provided ample adjustability to secure any bike. A locking, threaded hitch pin added to the security, and a set of hitch clamps locked the assembly down to the point where there was no movement in the rack. Some tools and a locking security cable are also included, and all are keyed alike for simplicity.

With an MSRP of \$549.99, the RV Rider is no minor investment. However, if you're carrying expensive bicycles on the back of a fifth-wheel or motorhome — say, \$5,000 to \$10,000 worth of e-bikes — you can rest assured that they will be safe on the road. **TL**

➔ **Hollywood Racks**, www.hollywoodracks.com

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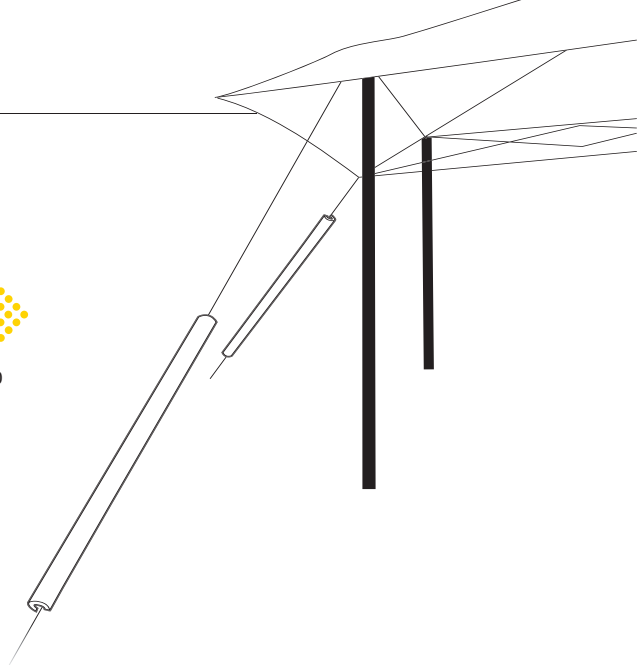
ProPride, Inc., Circle 124 on Reader Service Card



NO-TRIP TIE-DOWNS

After tripping one too many times over the tie-down cords to the pop-up tent canopy we use over the picnic table in the campground, I came up with an idea. I bought four brightly colored pool noodles, split each of them from one end to the other, and place them on the tie-down cords. Now everyone sees the cords, and the trip hazard is mitigated. And we can safely carry food and other items to the picnic table.

Keith Whitehead, Elizabethton, Tennessee



Mr. Clean

● I purchased a portable waste tank for use when camping at sites without sewer hookups. It has an opening to insert a garden hose for rinsing. However, the rinsing attachments I have found don't look like they would rinse sufficiently, so I designed something that works better.

My solution uses PEX tubing and fittings, which are not too expensive. Here's a list of the items I used: an adapter to connect my garden hose to PEX tubing, an adapter to reduce the diameter so I could use 1/2-inch PEX tubing, a PEX plug for the end of the wand, PEX clamps and a crimping tool. Although a crimping tool is needed, it's best to borrow one if

planning to use it only once. I also used a PEX shutoff valve that was left over from another project.

Using two pieces of short PEX tubing, I connected the garden-hose adapter, reducer and valve. To the other side of the valve I used about 18 inches of PEX tubing and installed a plug in the end. Using a 1/8-inch bit, I drilled eight holes around the tube near the plug and also drilled a hole through the plug so water would shoot out the bottom of the wand.

During use, high-velocity water sprays strongly out of all the holes. The device works even better than I anticipated. I can now be assured the inside of my portable waste tank gets a good rinsing after each use.

Michael Hinson
Brentwood, Tennessee



TECH ED TIP

➔ Nothing is worse than having bad-tasting or smelly water coming out of the tap. When dewinterizing, sanitize the fresh-water system using a commercial product or by following the procedure in the "Getting Ready to Roll" article: www.trailerlife.com/tech/diy/rv-101-getting-ready-to-roll. Always filter any water going into an RV. Camco, Clearsource, Clear20, Everpure and FlowPur offer filter systems, as does No Dirty Water with its ozonation process.

—Chris Dougherty

Get a Handle on It

● The door on my travel trailer features a standard handle and latch/lock system, but the handle does not allow me to get a secure enough grip to be able to control the door when the wind blows. The handle already had a couple of small holes in it, but it's easy to drill some if yours doesn't. I ran a black cable tie through the holes and cinched it down just enough to form a loop about the size of my hand. Perfect!

The cable tie is strong, secure and flexible. I can control the door, no matter where the wind is coming from or how hard it's blowing. The cable tie is flexible enough to fold flat when the trailer door is closed. It cost me close to nothing and took less than 10 minutes of my time.

Joe Malat, Punta Gorda, Florida

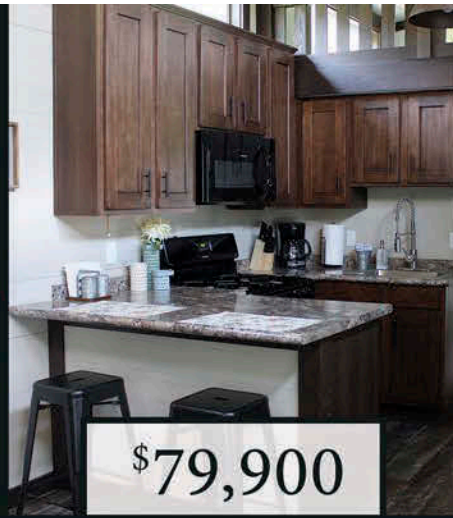


To submit a DIY tip, email 10minutetech@trailerlife.com or write to *Trailer Life*, 10-Minute Tech, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Provide a selection of good-quality high-resolution photos. *Trailer Life* will pay \$35 for original 10-Minute Tech ideas. All payments require an SSN or FEIN.



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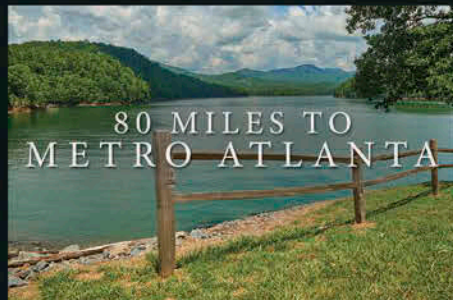
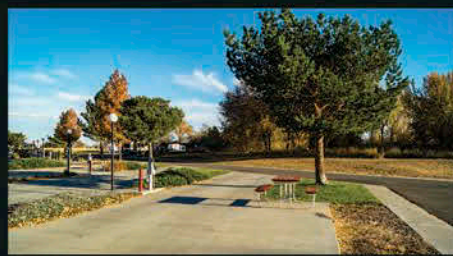
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LOVE SHACK, BABY

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I have always wanted to own a small 1950s camping trailer. Last June I came across a 7-foot-wide, 8-foot-long cutie for \$1,700 that needed lots of love. I haven't been able to determine the brand, and it's not a canned ham, but it's the next best thing. The previous owner had updated the interior, but I decided to go back to the original look.

With the help of my dear friend Denny, I pulled out the carpet and cupboards, painted the interior walls and ceiling, and put in a new subfloor and black and white floor tiles. I ordered a light-blue retro mini-refrigerator and decorated around it, using the color as inspiration.

The kitchen countertop was replaced with black and white ceramic tiles, and I built a narrow pantry cupboard in a space that otherwise would have been wasted. After reupholstering the seat cushions, I sewed curtains with leftover fabric.



PARTY LIKE IT'S 1959

Top to bottom: Nancy McLean revamped her petite trailer with a fresh coat of paint and a patio awning she stitched herself. Inside, she tiled the floor and countertop. A secondhand chalkboard hangs next to a tall pantry she built.

PHOTOS: NANCY MCLEAN



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RV MAKEOVER



Top: Under the cover of a garage, McLean primed and painted the exterior of the trailer. **Above:** A new retro-style mini-fridge that fit under the counter inspired the light-blue theme in the now-dubbed Love Shack.

The exterior had been repainted by a previous owner, but it wasn't done well, so the side walls were sanded down, primed and repainted. I made the patio awning out of material I found on sale. The decorative wing on the outside was something I added.

All told, I spent about \$400 on the renovation, so my total cost came to around \$2,100. Most of the decor was purchased from secondhand shops and yard sales. For instance, I bought the chalkboard that hangs on the inside of the door for \$5, and the little countertop oven with two burners came from Goodwill for \$20.

I named the trailer the Love Shack after all the hours of love that went into renovating it. She tips the scales at a light 1,040 pounds. — **Nancy McLean, Wayland, Michigan**

RV RENOVATIONS



Have you modified your RV or remodeled it completely? Tell us about it in 500 words or less, including the total cost and time spent, and email your description to info@trailerlife.com. Include an ample selection of photos illustrating the project, along with your full name and mailing address. We'll pay \$50 for every RV Makeover we publish.

**DEMCO 21K GM FIFTH-WHEEL HITCH \$937**

Demco's 21K Under Bed Mount Fifth-Wheel Hitch for new GM full-size trucks drops neatly into all longbed and most standard-bed 2020 Chevrolet/GMC 2500/3500 pickups equipped with the factory-installed fifth-wheel brackets, according to the manufacturer. Featuring a patented wraparound jaw, the U.S.-made hitch has a 21,000-pound towing capacity and four vertical-height adjustments, from 14 to 18 inches. The hitch is easy to install, claims Demco, and leaves the truck bed free of rails upon removal.

www.demco-products.com

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www.strombergcarlson.com

**BAL LIGHT TRAILER TIRE LEVELER \$74.99**

BAL RV Product Groups' Light Trailer Tire Leveler (model 28050) uses a drive-screw system built into a scissor-like tubular-steel assembly to lift the wheel of single-axle trailers, eliminating the need for moving the trailer onto blocks or ramps to get it level. Designed to fit 13- to 15-inch wheels, the tire leveler has a durable corrosion-resistant finish. The kit comes with a 3/4-inch ratchet wrench for use on the drive screw when lifting or lowering.

www.norcoind.com/bal

**OMNIA MUFFIN RING \$24.99**

The Swedish-made Omnia Stovetop Oven takes baking without a conventional oven to the next level with the new Muffin Ring accessory. With six collapsible muffin molds, the red silicone liner makes baking muffins and cupcakes just a pop and a mix away.

To put the new Muffin Ring to the test, I made cupcakes using white cake mix. After preheating the three-piece Omnia Stovetop Oven (base, baking pot and lid) on medium-low heat, I popped out the ring's individual muffin molds and lightly greased them. Then I poured the batter into the molds, placed the ring in the heated baking pot and replaced the lid. The instructions said to set the timer for 19 minutes, but the cupcakes wound up needing an extra 5 minutes of baking time.

Once the cupcakes cooled, I popped them out of the mold, topped them with white frosting and crumbled chocolate-cookie pieces, and — *voilà!* — sweet treats baked to perfection right on the stovetop.

www.omniasweden.com



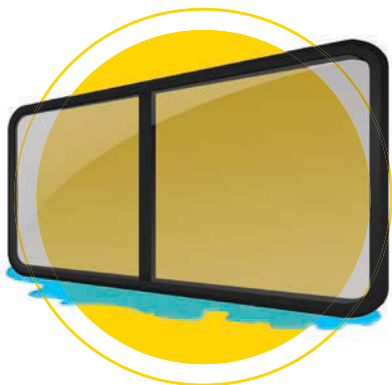
STAFF PICK After baking cornbread in the Omnia Stovetop Oven last fall (www.trailerlife.com/rv-gear/gear/staff-pick-omnia-stove-top-oven), I was eager to try out Omnia's new Muffin Ring. It worked like a charm, although baking cupcakes did take a bit longer than expected. Like the other parts of the stovetop oven, the silicone ring is easy to clean, and the muffin molds flatten down for compact storage. — *Kath Cunningham, Production Manager*

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www.curtmfg.com





POST-RAINSTORM DRIP

A reader in Texas turned to RV Resolutions when leaks in his new travel trailer weren't covered under the manufacturer's warranty:

FF My wife and I purchased a 2019 Forest River Wildcat 311RKS on August 11, 2018, from Camping World of Houston in our hometown of Katy, Texas. We followed the dealer's recommendations and took the trailer on three short shakedown trips near home to figure things out and find any problems that needed to be fixed.

Later, on the last night of our first long trip, we experienced a heavy rainstorm in Lubbock, Texas. We noticed

that water was pooling up on the floor and that it was coming out from underneath the baseboards directly underneath the windows in the living room and bedroom. There also seemed to be leakage from around the door. Based on what I saw, I am guessing that the water was running from the windows through the space between the exterior and interior walls. This would seem to be a situation for mold to develop.

Upon arriving back in Katy, I cleaned out the trailer and immediately took it to Camping World and explained the situation to our service rep, Olga Ray. Camping World was able to replicate the leaks in its shop.

A couple of weeks later, I received a phone call from Olga. She explained that Forest River was not going to cover the repairs. No solution was offered from the manufacturer, other than to say that the owner was responsible for maintaining all window and door seals after 90 days. I looked over the warranty document and had trouble finding a 90-day deadline anywhere.

This was the first rainstorm we experienced in the trailer, and I was disappointed to see that it had leaks like this. We keep the trailer stored in a covered and enclosed space. I feel that the window leaks are a manufacturing defect and could not have been discovered until we had a rainstorm. If there was leakage prior to this, I was unable to detect it, and there were no signs of water damage. The trailer was not yet one year old when the storm occurred.

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I have enclosed copies of all email correspondence and shop work orders between Camping World, Forest River and myself. I am asking that Forest River replace the windows along with the necessary sealant. I believe that I should have a leak-free trailer.

David Reynolds, Katy, Texas

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

RV Resolutions forwarded David Reynolds' circumstances to Forest River and received the following reply:

We are sorry to hear of the concern Mr. Reynolds is having with his Wildcat travel trailer. Our warranty manager, Shannon Hunter, has been in contact with the customer and Camping World. The customer is to contact Camping World to set up an appointment to have the concerns with water leaks taken care of under warranty through Forest River.

Sara Hankins, Retail Customer Service Advisor
Forest River/Prime Time, Wakarusa, Indiana

Recall Runaround

While reading "Same-Day Service" in the October 2019 RV Resolutions, a California reader found out about a recall on an electric tongue jack that she had replaced at her own expense:

“I'm writing to say thank you. I was reading the October issue, and to my surprise, I learned that the tongue jack on our 2018 Lance travel trailer had been recalled. We'd had the jack replaced at our local dealership because of a problem with it, but the recall was never mentioned.

After reading RV Resolutions, I called the Lance corporate facility in Lancaster, California. They were very kind but stated that I needed to contact Lippert Components, the manufacturer

of the jack, and provided me with the phone number.

I called and was told that I would need the model number of the original jack to verify for the recall. Well, that jack was long gone. I was also told that Lippert had sent a recall letter to all of its agents on January 5, 2019, so the dealership should have been informed.

I called the dealership and explained to the service manager that I wanted the cost of the jack refunded due to the recall. It took a few more days, but the dealership finally agreed to refund me by check.

Thanks to *Trailer Life*, I am a happy camper once more. I will write down all model numbers in the future to prevent another mishap.

Melody Aardema, Norwalk, California

NEED HELP RESOLVING AN RV ISSUE ?

RV Resolutions is *Trailer Life's* forum for the settlement of conflicts between consumers and RV dealers and manufacturers, accessory suppliers and service providers. After exhausting all other resources without success, mail a typed letter to *Trailer Life* RV Resolutions, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Include copies of appropriate bills and correspondence along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Selected letters will be edited and published unless otherwise requested.

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FRAME-WELDING PRECAUTIONS

Q I recently purchased a 2009 Palomino Puma 19FS. Due to very limited storage room, I plan to have the tail section of the frame beefed up and get a 2-by-2-inch receiver box welded on so I can use one of those basket-style cargo carriers for additional supplies.

I know that before doing any welding on the trailer's frame I need to disconnect the battery, but is there anything else I need to do to protect the trailer's electrical system?

Frank Conaway, Abbott, Texas



A Protecting electrical devices from stray feedback current that's possible with some types of welding apparatus is a good idea, Frank. In addition to disconnecting the positive battery terminal, just to be sure, you may want to also disconnect the positive power line from the converter to the fuse and breaker panel. Once those lines are out of the circuit, the devices are connected to the RV by way of their ground connections — and that means there's no complete power loop to deliver any welding-current feedback.

While planning your aft-end cargo carrier, keep an eye on how much weight you'll be adding out back. A travel trailer should have at least 10 percent of its overall weight, or somewhat more, carried on the hitch. If you load the cargo carrier with heavy material, such as a generator, firewood and the like, you could possibly shift enough weight from the hitch to reduce the trailer's towing stability.

A stop at a public scale to determine the trailer's loaded axle and hitch weights without the carrier, then doing the same after installing the carrier and loading it with your desired cargo will determine if there is a balance problem. It's always a good idea to pay attention to such weight figures when doing any fore and aft load and balance changes on a trailer.

Another option is the Curt Bolt-On Universal Hitch Receiver (see www.trailerlife.com/tech/universal-hitch-receiver-curt-bolt-on-rv-trailer-hitch).

Gooseneck or Fifth-Wheel?

Q A friend and I were wondering about the difference between a gooseneck hookup and a fifth-wheel hookup. Is there an advantage to using one or the other? It seems to me that more and more RVers are converting horse trailers into RVs now.

Eric Snyder, Florence, Colorado

A Horse-trailer conversions with living space instead of just animal-hauling holds are indeed popular, and are one reason for the use of a gooseneck-style hitch.

The main difference between a gooseneck-style hitch and a conventional RV-style fifth-wheel hitch is the hardware, as both systems do the same job and produce the same towing results. The gooseneck-style hitch is far more commonly used by commercial and agricultural users because, when not in use, there's nothing but a hitch ball in the truck bed instead of a large hitch assembly. The hitch ball is easily removed or folded out of the way, depending on the hitch manufacturer, and that leaves the truck bed completely free for

farm or industry use.

For users who already have a gooseneck ball in their truck bed, there are numerous adapters available that enable hitching an RV-style trailer to a gooseneck ball. These adapters bolt to the trailer's pinbox and have the latch hardware to secure the new hitch to the gooseneck ball. Complete replacement hitch assemblies, such as the new Gen-Y hitch, are also available for RV fifth-wheel trailers to enable use with a gooseneck hitch ball.

If you choose one of these gooseneck adapter alternatives, be sure to verify that your trailer frame is capable of handling the potential extra-leverage stress caused by the forward-angled pin box. Your trailer manufacturer (or the chassis manufacturer, if the trailer builder claims to not know anything) can help with that information.

Truck Aft-End Squat

Q January's RV Clinic had several letters regarding truck aft-end squat. I went to a Ford F-150 forum on towing issues, and there was mention of Timbren suspension kits, which I may give a try. It may help to



READER'S TIP: PLANK FLOORING FOLLOW-UP

➔ Regarding Dave Nichols' December 2019 letter, "Replacement Plank Flooring, Part 2," I have had great success with a flooring product called Tranquility that I purchased at Lumber Liquidators. About five years ago, I replaced the original sheet-vinyl floor in a Flagstaff trailer that had split the entire length of the trailer during winter storage.

I, too, was concerned with the planks staying in place and not separating from each other, especially when the trailer was moving. The floor still looks great with no problems whatsoever. I even had to remove some of it to replace a rotted subfloor, and it clicked right back in place and has stayed put. This product really dressed up an otherwise mediocre RV.

Richard Lanier, Feeding Hills, Massachusetts

Thank you for the vote of confidence and details, Richard. Click-together plank-type replacement flooring is becoming more popular with RVers, and it's good to have a firsthand report. "Much obliged," as my grandfather would say!

get rid of squirrely steering. What do you think?

Mike Lawler, Downers Grove, Illinois

A The Timbren kits, called SES (Suspension Enhancement Systems), are, in simplified terms, large rubber blocks that bolt to the vehicle's chassis and contact the axle or spring components when the suspension is loaded, and function like

overload springs. They're much like the rubber bump stops that provide a limit to upward axle movement, except the Timbrens are taller and more compressible.

When the load on the vehicle compresses the suspension, at some point the axle or springs (depending on the vehicle model) contact the Timbrens, and they provide extra support. Unlike airbags, which can

be inflated or deflated according to the needs of the varying loads on the vehicle, the Timbrens provide the same degree of load support when they're engaged.

If you prefer the ability to change the amount of load support and ride stiffness for the truck's rear axle, an airbag would be a better choice. But if you have a consistent load size and the load-carrying need is about the same from day to day, the Timbrens would probably be a good choice.

COMMENTS: FIFTH-WHEEL BED CLEARANCE

👉 I read Mike Jones' January letter, "Fifth-Wheel Gooeneck Clearance," regarding clearance problems with his Chevy 2500HD and immediately identified with him. I went through the usual raise-the-hitch, lower-the-pin-box thing and, of course, was dismayed at the degree of rear tilt on our 33-foot trailer.

I became curious about lowering the truck and found shackles that fit the rear springs. These would give it either a 1- or 2-inch drop, so I chose to do a 2-inch. After the install and loading the trailer on the truck, I was impressed with the results until I looked forward of the rear shackle and discovered hard interference between the spring and a body/bed mount. After some unsavory manipulations, I came away very happy, and a test ride helped prove my changes.

The takeaway from all this is to use the 1-inch drop to avoid any interference and still gain a nice change in ride height.

Peter Goodwin, Portland, Maine

Thank you for the firsthand-user report on another method of easing the uneven fifth-wheel trailer situation. Your experience reminds us that, when considering something like a suspension modification, it's important to look at all the associated parts and how they'll be affected by the changes you have in mind. We're glad this worked out well for you in the end.



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➔ I had a similar problem to Mike Jones'. I have a Keystone Cougar fifth-wheel. I needed it raised for clearance on my Ram 2500. The trailer already had spring-over axles. I found a good solution at Camping World with the Correct Track Trailer Alignment System Kit for aligning axles that, when installed, raised my trailer enough to give the needed clearance. The really good part was that it cost just over \$400. It's a very simple process, and no cutting or welding was required on my trailer.

David Servaes, Simi Valley, California

That's good information about the axle-alignment kit, David. This kit is for correcting trailer-axle alignment, but its hardware also raises the trailer-frame height by a couple of inches. It's yet another means of addressing the unlevel trailer situation. Thank you for sending that along.

Replacement Tire Pressure

Q I replaced my OEM Michelin tires on my 2015 Toyota Tundra with an LT tire of the same size, the General Grabber A/TX AT275/65R18 load range E with a maximum 80 PSI. The original OEM tires were rated at 51 PSI max.

What air pressure should I run to keep the sidewalls safe from fatigue and help with sway? I'm pulling a 10,000-pound toy hauler with about 1,000 pounds on the ball using a Blue Ox SwayPro hitch with 10,000-pound-rated weight-distributing (WD) spring bars and Firestone Ride-Rite airbags. Running lower pressures invites sidewall fatigue and heat, plus that "mushy" feeling side to side. I've been told anywhere from 40 to 76 PSI so I'm confused.

Wayne Powell, Lake Havasu City, Arizona

A To know where you stand on a recommended inflation pressure, you should first take your truck, with the trailer hitched up and everything loaded for a trip, to a public scale to determine its axle weights. For the sake of the discussion, we'll say that the weight on the rear, with trailer hitched, is 4,000 pounds.

Every tire manufacturer publishes load and pressure tire-inflation charts for its products. For your truck's new tires, for example, the General chart shows weights from 3,415 pounds

capacity at 80 PSI to 1,940 pounds of capacity at 35 PSI. That's a total of 13,660 pounds of tire capacity for your truck at 80 PSI. That's also 6,830 pounds per axle. Your truck would ride like a buckboard at that pressure.

Be sure to check the wheels to be certain they're rated to handle the extra pressure and weight capabilities of the new tires. The wheel's ratings will be stamped somewhere on the back side, possibly on the rim.

Using our 4,000-pounds guess-timate for the rear axle weight, we looked at the General inflation chart that shows 3,000 pounds capacity per tire, or 6,000 pounds for the axle, at 65 PSI. Even at 55 PSI, the figure is 2,660 pounds per tire or 5,320 pounds capacity for the axle. That 5,320-pound figure would still leave 1,320 pounds of extra tire capacity above the manufacturer's rating. Going up a bit to 60 PSI results in 2,825 pounds per tire or 5,650 pounds of capacity per axle.

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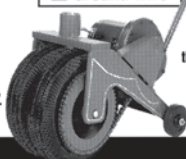
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While every effort is made to maintain accuracy and completeness, last-minute changes may occasionally result in omissions or errors.

RV CLINIC

ibility to play with. You could start at 65 PSI and see how the truck rides and handles, then perhaps drop to 60 PSI and see how it does. You'll probably be good all the way down to 55 PSI, at which point the truck would ride far smoother than at 80 PSI, but you may not like the steering and handling feel at that pressure. With the real-world loaded truck axle weight in hand, you can use the General tire-inflation chart to experiment with pressure and how it affects drivability.

You also need to pay attention to the truck's tow rating and the trailer weight. The Tundra would be rated to tow 10,500 pounds at maximum, so a 10,000-pound trailer is really pushing that limit. **RV**

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Email rvclinic@trailerlife.com or write to RV Clinic, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Include your full name and hometown. Selected letters will be answered in the magazine, but time does not permit individual replies. No phone calls, please.

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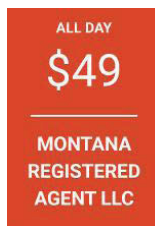
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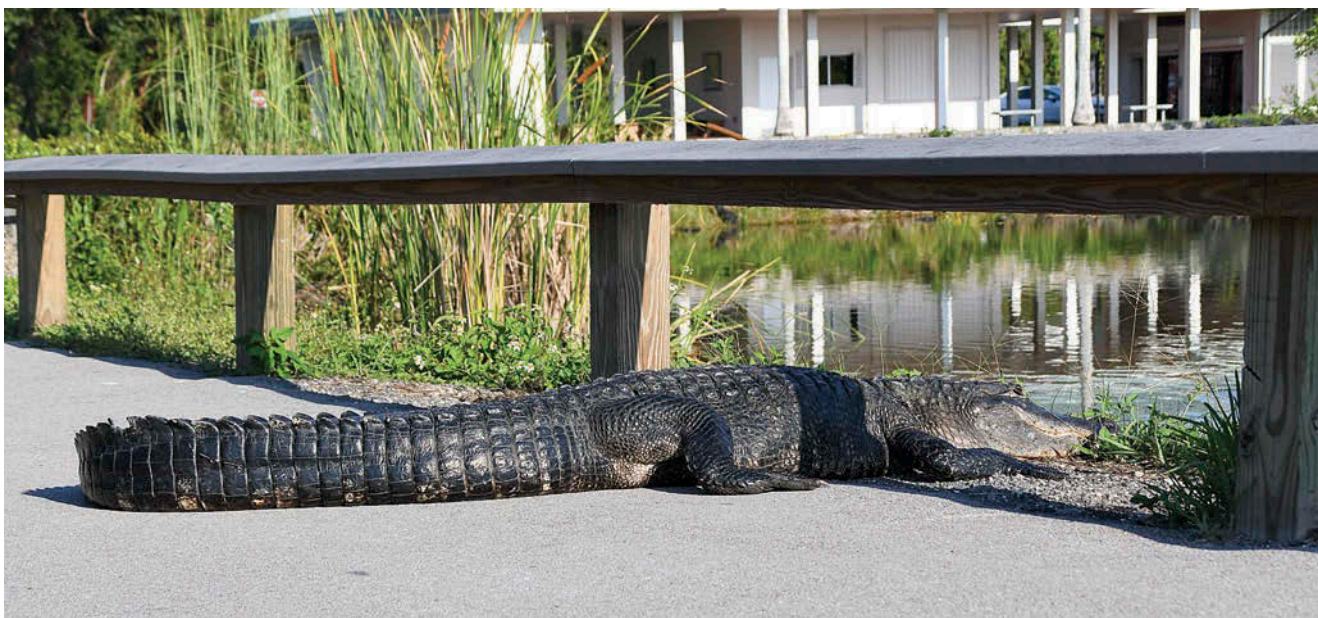
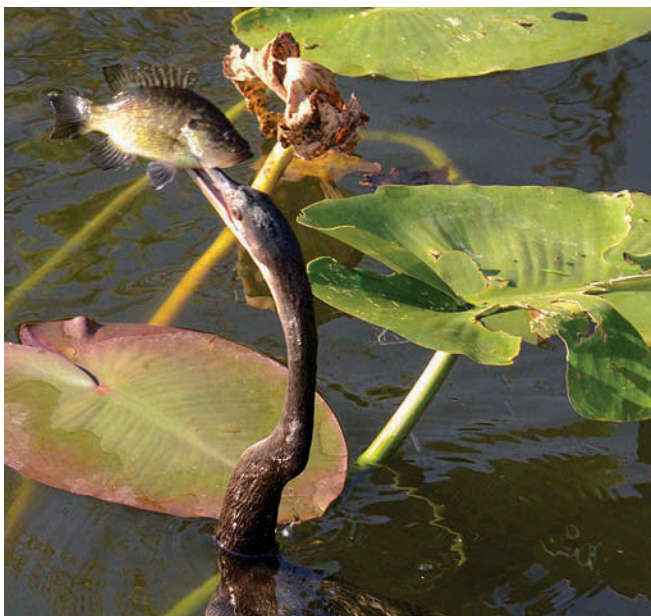
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Alligator Encounters

Up-close wildlife watching in Florida's Everglades National Park

— by Lisa Ballard

Last spring, I peered into the open jaws of a 10-foot alligator. Luckily, it was more interested in eating a turtle. Full disclosure: I was 30 yards away on the Anhinga Trail in Florida's Everglades National Park, and it was wallowing in weedy backwater beside the trail.

Where there are gators, other wildlife abounds, especially during the December through

April dry season. The alligators' abandoned nests retain water, providing shelter and nesting habitat for other species. A night heron stood motionless on the bank below the trail. A cattle egret strutted by, and an anhinga speared a fish underwater with its bill.

Alligators in the Everglades are fascinating to watch, and they're easy to spot, napping in the sun

or lazing in a marshy pool with their eyes and snouts barely above the water. Observing these iconic reptiles is just one great reason to visit this unique, subtropical park.

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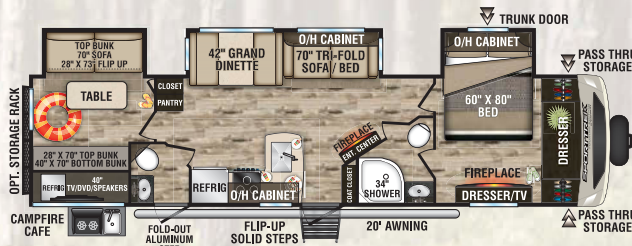
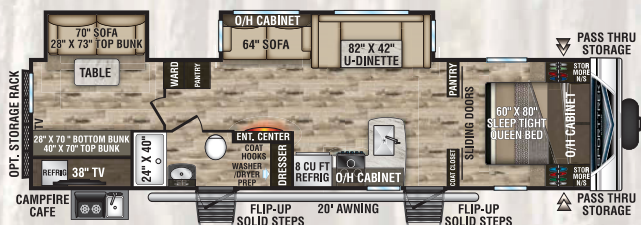
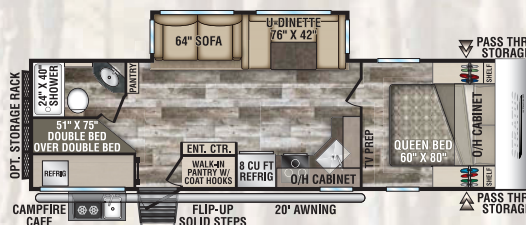
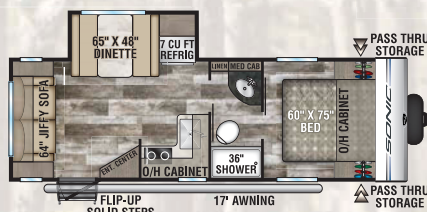
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