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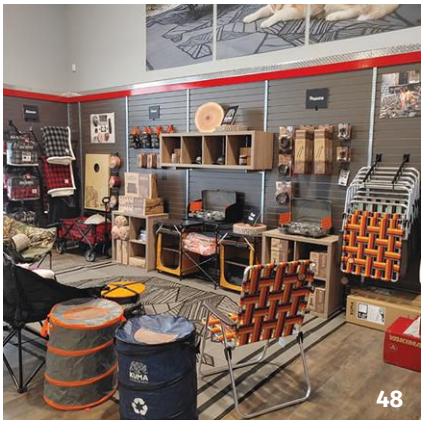
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MORE OF WHAT MATTERS



I've been thinking a lot about teamwork lately and what it means to be a good team member. At RV PRO's parent company, Cahaba Media Group, we have a strong team that ensures each issue of the magazine, newsletter, podcast and more get to you on time and provide the information you want and need. That includes Shelby Dempsey, our digital production designer, who works with us every day to get the daily newsletter deployed; Melanie Magee, our art director who brings creativity and skill to each page of each issue; and Holly Strickland, our client services coordinator who gets our ads in on time, makes sure we have everything we need for trade shows and much more. We editors at RV PRO couldn't do one lick of what we do without these team members.

Understanding each other's strengths and trusting each other to be reliable and dependable for the team isn't something we take lightly – and you shouldn't either. According to Gallup, there are three characteristics of a well-connected team that result in a positive company culture:

1. Trust – confidence in each other's reliability and dependability
2. Teamwork – appreciation of each other's talents and strengths and how they help tackle challenges together
3. Emotional loyalty – deep-seated loyalty to the team

When teams work well together and produce a culture that's motivating, a high level of engagement is often the result and, as Gallup reports, several business outcomes are impacted by strong engagement:

- 41% lower absenteeism
- 17% higher productivity
- 24% lower turnover
- 21% higher profitability

Thankfully for us, RV PRO finds inspiration and motivation not only from its own team members, but also from the teams we see throughout the RV industry. Take Century Chemical Corporation (pg. 41), where their small but mighty team continues to grow a brand that's a mainstay for many RVers. At Pete's RV Center, opportunities to expand abound and embracing team members such as Kevin Thomas have helped show how diversity creates possibility (pg. 28). And for OzX, teaming up with Dave Carter & Associates has helped the Australian-based company bring its power solutions to the United States (pg. 34).

"When team members value each other's strengths, they more effectively relate to one another, avoid potential conflicts, boost group cohesion and create positive dialogue," the Gallup report states.

To me, this all boils down to respect. Respecting one another's contributions to the team, and to the company overall, creates loyalty. Building a team that relies on one another and can trust each other, makes our organizations stronger, which in turn delivers better business results.

If your team has some best practices that you've learned, please share them with me at jdking@cahabamedia.com.

As always, thanks for reading!

Jennifer King

BUILDING A BETTER TEAM

1. Give people the opportunity to do what they do best.
2. The most effective teams trust one another to deliver quality work, so share a common definition of quality and talk about quality as a fundamental value of the team.
3. Create an opportunity for two employees to work on a project together so that they can each do what they do best and possibly develop a closer relationship. As the pairs find better ways to work together, their insights about partnerships lead to enhanced trust and relationships across the whole team over time.
4. Set goals for your team that align with the overall mission, purpose and vision of the organization.
5. Lead open discussions about recent problems your team has faced. Talk about what went wrong but focus more on best practices for the future.
6. Identify and discuss quality with your team. Learn what quality means to them and the things they do to foster high-quality standards.
7. Share best practices. From research or experience, maybe both, share some of the best practices for teamwork in the workplace and encourage others to share theirs.

Source: Gallup

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RV Shipments Down Nearly 50% at Year's Halfway Point

Results for the RV Industry Association's June 2023 survey of manufacturers found that total RV shipments ended the month with 24,095 units, a decrease of 46.4% compared to the 44,942 units shipped in June 2022. Halfway through 2023, RV shipments are down 49.2% at 164,830 units.

"RVing has remained a preferred way to travel for more than 44 million Americans planning RV trips this summer," said RVIA President and CEO Craig Kirby. "Our latest RV shipment forecast shows that shipments should begin to recover later this year and into 2024 as consumer confidence increases and the ongoing interest in camping and RVing turns into increased RV sales."

Towable RVs, led by conventional travel trailers, ended the month down 48.3% from last June with 20,670 shipments. Motorhomes finished the month down 30.8% compared to the same month last year with 3,425 units.

Park model RVs finished June up 7.7% compared to the same month last year, with 39 wholesale shipments.

THOR Industries Makes Key Management Changes

THOR Industries is making key changes in leadership positions at several of its operating companies.

Ryan Juday assumes the role of president of KZ Recreational Vehicles and Kyle Kwasny assumes the role of president of Heartland RV. Both Juday, who has been with THOR for 23 years, and Kwasny, who is a 19-year industry veteran, are seasoned leaders with proven track records, the company said. Juday most recently served as president of THOR company Heartland RV and Kwasny most recently served as president of THOR company Dutchmen RV.

"The depth and experience of the leadership teams across the THOR family of companies sets us apart from the rest of the RV industry and positions us to make essential moves when it's in the best interest of the operating companies and their dealers to do so," said Bob Martin, THOR president and CEO. "Experience and fit within an organization are essential to long-term success in our industry. These two moves mark an important step in aligning two of our talented leaders with the vision of each of our operating companies.

"When KZ tragically lost its president, Aram Koltookian, it required a comprehensive evaluation of talent across the enterprise to find the best leader for KZ's future. Ryan Juday is that leader. Ryan is a proven winner and has been a key leader at THOR since he rose to a leadership position at THOR company Keystone RV, and ultimately became president at Heartland RV. Ryan's leadership is ideally suited for KZ because of its strong history of nurturing long-term relationships with key dealer partners and building quality products.

"Kyle Kwasny has done an outstanding job building industry-leading brands at Dutchmen RV, while staying focused on quality," he added. "Kyle's data-driven approach to the long-term success of the business makes him the ideal candidate to lead the Heartland RV Company, which includes Heartland RV, DRV and CRV."

Dutchmen RV will continue to operate as a division of Keystone RV and will be led by Keystone RV's President Jeff Runnels.

Tiffin Group Announces Executive Promotions

The Tiffin Group announced a series of executive promotions within its sales, marketing, product development and service operations teams.

Freddie Swinney, formerly national sales manager for Tiffin Motorhomes Class A and C, has been appointed vice president of sales for the Tiffin Group.

Jayne Fairley, previously regional sales manager for the Southeast region A and C, is now national sales manager for Class A and Super C.

Kevin Kotrous, previously representing the West Coast for Class C, has been elevated to national sales manager for Class C.

Jonathan Osborne transitions from his role as vice president of service operations to Class B national sales manager.

In addition, acknowledging the indispensable role marketing and customer experience play in its business:

- Brett Shelton assumes the vice president of marketing and events position, poised to lead Tiffin's comprehensive marketing initiatives, including for the Allegro Club.
- Allen Bridges, previously director of supply chain, takes the helm as vice president of service operations.
- Brad Warner, with a rich background as director of Class A engineering and operations manager for PowerGlide Chassis, steps into the role of vice president of product development.

"These executive promotions spotlight the caliber and commitment of our leadership," said Leigh Tiffin, Tiffin's president. "I am confident that these enhancements will enable us to achieve our strategic objectives, all the while staying true to the values that define Tiffin."

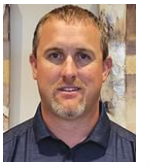
Blue Ox Announces Two Promotions

Blue Ox announced two promotions that it said will immediately strengthen its commitment to innovation and excellent service.



Paul Choquette

Paul Choquette is elevated to the role of vice president of operations. With a tenure at the company spanning 14 years, Choquette has worked his way up through various roles, starting as a college intern. He's also held the title of draftsperson, project engineer, engineering manager and, in 2020, director of operations. His new role will have him extending his leadership across plant operations and supply chain challenges and the company said he will be pivotal in steering the innovation trajectory of Blue Ox products.



Justin Parrott

Justin Parrott assumes the Canada regional manager/ national trainer role. Parrott started with Blue Ox in May 2021 as a product trainer, then quickly advancing to national trainer. He has more than 20 years of dealership experience along with extensive training knowledge. He'll handle everything for Blue Ox north of the border.

"Paul and Justin's promotions signal our commitment to internal growth and enduring promise to serve our customers with unparalleled excellence. Their vast experiences will fortify our brand's promise and innovation in the towing equipment sector," said CEO Mike Hesse.

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Brinkley RV Adds Cam Boyer to Leadership Team



Cam Boyer

Brinkley RV named Cam Boyer as its vice president. Boyer is highly respected in the RV industry and previously served as CFO/COO of Grand Design RV, the company said.

"Cam played a vital leadership role for us at our previous company by getting deeply involved in all operational issues. He is much more than just a numbers guy. Looking ahead for Brinkley, Cam will bring insight to our various leaders as we build our experience and company," said Ron Fenech, president of Brinkley RV.

Boyer worked for Grand Design from 2013 to 2022. Prior to that, he was in leadership at THOR and Jayco's Starcraft RV.

"I've watched with excitement what they are building at Brinkley and want to be a part of creating something really special in our industry," Boyer said.

Co-owner Ryan Thwaits said, "Micah, Nate and I are excited to have Cam join the Brinkley team. From our experience working with him in the past, we know he is a strong leader with a wealth of knowledge and a track record of excellence. We are confident that Cam will be a valuable asset to our team."

Sunset Park RV Names National Sales Manager

Sunset Park RV has named Damon DeJesus its national sales manager. The company said DeJesus brings a valuable combination of youth and industry experience to the role and will lead the company's sales team.

"We are proud to promote Damon to a national sales manager," said Jonathan Yoder, one of the owners and vice president of Sunset Park. "Damon has a proven track record of success in the RV industry, and we are confident that he will be a valuable asset to Sunset Park RV in this role."

DeJesus is a graduate of the University of Indiana.

"I am thrilled with this opportunity with the Sunset Park RV team," DeJesus said. "I have been impressed with our company's products and its commitment to bringing new ideas to customers. I look forward to working with the team to grow the business and bring Sunset Park RV to new heights."

The announcement of DeJesus' appointment comes as Sunset Park RV is preparing for its annual Dealer Open House in Elkhart, Indiana. Their event will take place Sept. 25-28 at Signature Lanes in Elkhart. All of Sunset Park RV's units will be on display, and there will be free bowling and dinner for attendees on Monday night.

"We are excited for a good turnout from our dealer body," Yoder said. "We look forward to hanging out with our dealer in a relaxed, fun atmosphere, Sunset Park style."

Alliance RV Buys Land to Support Growth

Alliance RV said it has bought an additional 37 contiguous acres to its existing Elkhart, Indiana, campus in preparation for future growth.

"Our commitment from day one was to grow Alliance RV in a deliberate and responsible manner while maintaining unparalleled product quality and ensuring the best possible customer ownership experience through exceptional customer service," said co-founder Coley Brady. "The acquisition of this land will allow us to continue to execute on those objectives."

With the addition of a new production line that is scheduled to be complete in Q4, the company said it will have over 800,000 total square feet under roof by the end of the year. The recently acquired land will support an additional 400,000 square feet.

Added co-founder Ryan Brady, "Our growth has been made possible from the unwavering dedication of our 600-plus team members, our incredible dealer and supplier partners, and the over 10,000 retail customers who have been on this path of growth with us. This strategic land purchase will solidify our independent market position and support the next chapter of Alliance RV."

APCO Holdings Acquires Relentless Dealer Services

APCO Holdings, home to the EasyCare, National Auto Care, GWC Warranty and MemberCare brands, announced that it recently acquired the assets of Relentless Dealer Services LLC.

Relentless Dealer Services (RDS) provides F&I services to the RV and marine markets. RDS claims to offer a fresh approach to F&I and cutting-edge analytics, expert training and best-in-class F&I products, helping dealers develop their F&I strategy to increase revenue and profitability.

RDS is home to Adventure RV Club that provides a value-added membership for RVers, with exclusive discounts on RV-related products and services.

"We are excited to announce the acquisition of Relentless Dealer Services," said Tony Wanderon, CEO of APCO Holdings. "Our teams share a common passion for putting customers first in all they do, making this a natural fit."

Jamison Carrier, founder of RDS, said, "The RDS team has always been passionate about working with dealers to transform the norms of F&I. The additional resources APCO provides our team will help to drive dealer and agent performance to the next level."

R. Yoder Construction, ATC Celebrate New ATC Headquarters



R. Yoder Construction and ATC Trailers hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony at ATC's new grounds at 34600 US-6, Nappanee, Indiana, marking the grand opening of the new ATC headquarters and manufacturing facility.

The new state-of-the-art steel structure provides 221,000 square feet of RV manufacturing and office space for ATC Trailers' operations and features a new 7,840-square-foot, multi-use showroom and café. The facility also features a rain bay.

Duane Yoder, CEO of ATC, expressed his enthusiasm for his company's new home.

"After just 16 months of construction, ATC is excited to announce the grand opening of our new headquarters in Nappanee," Yoder said. "This new building has 'state of the art' trailer and RV assembly lines with full quality and PDI functionality built in. We have experienced tremendous growth during our past 20 years in this community, and this facility will enable ATC to continue growing our capabilities and increase our capacity to serve our customers nationwide."

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Aftermarket Awards Spotlight Year's Top Performers

The RV Industry Association (RVIA)'s annual Aftermarket Conference was held in August in San Diego, and its awards ceremony highlighted some of the year's top performers in this vital segment of the industry.

The centerpiece of the conference is the three days of meetings where conference attendees – RV aftermarket suppliers and distributors – get to re-establish old relationships and forge new ones. But the awards might be the most popular night of the event, where competitors cheer for their rivals' victory and everyone comes together in the spirit of the industry.

Award winners this year were as follows:

Distributor of the Year: Arrow Distributing
Supplier of the Year: Walex Group
Rep Group of the Year: Tom Manning and Associates
Product of the Year: MORryde Safe-T-Rail
Lifetime Achievement Award: Art Tischer of Atlas Trailer Coach Products

John Tinghitella, RVIA aftermarket committee chairman and owner of RV Designer, which supplies aftermarket hardware and other parts for RVs, said the annual conference is one of the most important of the year for companies like his.

The 2024 RV Aftermarket Conference is scheduled for Aug. 12-15 in Orlando, Florida. For more information, visit rvia.org/events/rv-aftermarket-conference. RVP





Supplier of the Year, Walex Group (left) and Lifetime Achievement Award winner Art Tischer



Product of the Year, MORryde Safe-T-Rail



Rep Group of the Year, Tom Manning and Associates



Distributor of the Year, Arrow Distributing



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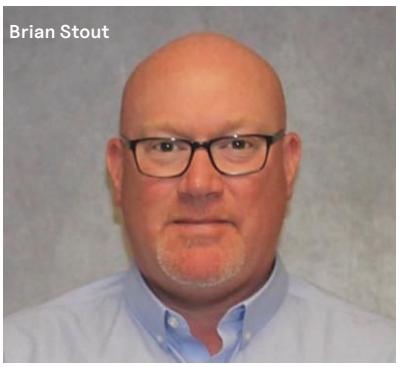
Midwest Automotive Designs manages production rates through its relationship with Mercedes-Benz and its adoption of computer machining technologies.

BY MIKE HARBOUR



After almost 10 years in the Class B market, Midwest Automotive Designs is banking on a plant expansion, a foreign trade zone and an emphasis on employee training to take it into another successful decade.

The Elkhart, Indiana, upfitter has been building luxury vans based on the ubiquitous Mercedes-Benz Sprinter since its North American introduction in 2001, making Midwest one of the first companies to modify the vehicle. In 2014, Midwest introduced its first Sprinter-based RV, dubbed the Weekender, and today, its wide range of highline Class Bs – sold through 50 dealers in the United States – accounts for about half of the company's business.



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LEANING IN for FURTHER GROWTH

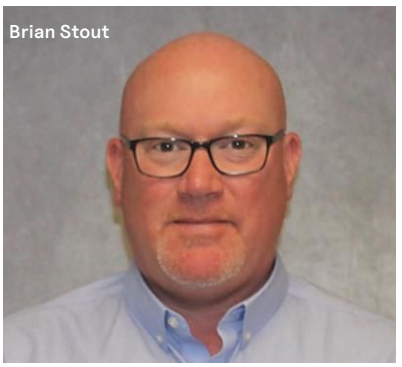
Midwest Automotive Designs manages production rates through its relationship with Mercedes-Benz and its adoption of computer machining technologies.

BY MIKE HARBOUR



After almost 10 years in the Class B market, Midwest Automotive Designs is banking on a plant expansion, a foreign trade zone and an emphasis on employee training to take it into another successful decade.

The Elkhart, Indiana, upfitter has been building luxury vans based on the ubiquitous Mercedes-Benz Sprinter since its North American introduction in 2001, making Midwest one of the first companies to modify the vehicle. In 2014, Midwest introduced its first Sprinter-based RV, dubbed the Weekender, and today, its wide range of highline Class Bs – sold through 50 dealers in the United States – accounts for about half of the company's business.



Brian Stout





With explosive sales numbers, Midwest has acquired four plant relocations since 2012, each one overseen by Brian Stout, former director of operations and now vice president and general manager. He's especially excited about the company's most recent expansion.

"There was a building that became available which is linked to our present property and it's 75,000 square feet. It increases the size of our campus and we're not traveling or going down the road. It's literally on-site," he says. "We were really limited on our production capabilities within the buildings we have and this allows us to have an enormous amount of growth potential over the next couple of years."

Midwest's use of cells, a lean manufacturing component that groups work stations and machines together to produce a finished product, suits the low-volume upfitter perfectly because the plant only produces about 40 vans weekly. Stout says adding more cells in the new building means higher production. It's a necessary approach as Midwest vans contain so many custom-made components, most made on-site, and using a typical assembly line would be inefficient.





Until the brand was purchased by REV Group in 2017, Stout says lean methodology, the practice of reducing waste from the manufacturing process, wasn't really on the company's radar.

"We were on such a growth pace that we were constantly trying to build more, hire more people, but getting involved with lean has really made us pay attention a lot more to the details," he says.

EMBRACING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Once under new ownership, Midwest began investing heavily in CNC (computer numerical control) technology.

"We've put probably close to $750,000 into machinery like CNCs just in the last couple of years. We have CNCs that rout wood, we have CNCs that cut vinyl and we also have CNCs that quilt, so they sew onto vinyl," Stout says. "As we're investing into our future, we're investing into improving the efficiencies we can get, but also the longevity of the company and the growth that we can get out of it."

Equally important was the formation of a foreign trade zone to enable the direct importation of German-built Sprinter chassis, supplementing Mercedes' sole North American facility built in 2006 near Charleston, South Carolina.


Jake Stephenson

"When they built the factory, it was designed for an output of 40,000 units," says Jake Stephenson, director of sales.

"The demand in this country was for more than that, and so for each of the last three years, they've always allocated how many you'd get, but as the year went on, that number kept changing and getting cut.

"We were never able to get a consistent flow of chassis to the number that we were asking for, and so we went through a fairly lengthy process of setting up a foreign trade zone here and getting approval from Mercedes-Benz in Germany to buy chassis from them direct to ship over. This May we started receiving our first chassis from Germany. We still buy from both locations, but having that dual source definitely helps."

EMPLOYEE RETENTION & TRAINING

The third focal point Midwest concentrated on during 2023 has been keeping its 300 employees aboard, according to Stout, and not losing them for what may seem like greener pastures at the numerous competing facilities in the region.

"It's the retention that we've really focused on because there is a tremendous amount of money and time spent on training new employees. If you don't engage with them, and then they leave to go somewhere else, you've got to start all over. Our biggest thing was focusing a lot more on the education and the process controls for each job so that it's well understood," Stout says. "I think that by engaging with the employee to let them know exactly how to do their job correctly, giving them everything they need to achieve that, we've gotten them a lot more engaged with liking to work for Midwest and not wanting to leave."



"AS WE'RE INVESTING INTO OUR FUTURE, WE'RE INVESTING INTO IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCIES WE CAN GET, BUT ALSO INTO THE LONGEVITY OF THE COMPANY."

Being an hourly shop makes a difference, Stephenson says, and it's working; more than a third of Midwest's employees have been with the company more than 10 years.

"We're expecting quality work, not a guy out there running around just doing it as fast as he can. A lot of good workers would prefer to work in that type of system than in a rate shop where it's just slammed together as fast as possible. They'd rather be proud of what they've done at the end of the day," he says.

With the advent of CNC, tasks that took employees longer to do are done more quickly and with few errors, but Stout says training is still key.

"It's definitely more of a skill set. You can be an operator and push a button and the CNC goes, but you also have to be really educated on the performance of the machine so when it's having a problem, you have to figure out the problem and adjust to it, as well as making sure you're getting the most potential out of it," he says.

"We are getting more highly skilled positions because of things like that and being engaged with understanding how to use equipment, along with other training in electrical and plumbing."

Midwest also will be rolling out certified welder training, another initiative moving throughout REV Group companies. Ultimately, the idea is to keep employees moving along a career path at Midwest.

"What we try to do, along with HR, is get real engagement with the employees to understand and show them the pathway. Everyone wants to make more money, but we need to do it by job task and education and cross training," he says. RVP

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The Rise of Boutique Van Builds

As "van-life" grows in popularity, dealers and Class B builders weigh their options on how best to do business.



Outside Van's production lines inside their new 150,000-square-foot facility

In RV parlance, a boutique build is a Class B build done by small- to medium-sized van converters, most of whom are outside the sphere of Elkhart, Indiana – the hub of most of the RV industry. While RV Industry Association (RVIA) certification separated the two, a number of builders sought approval and joined the association. Mercedes-Benz and Ford upfitter participants have distinguished themselves in that respect, too.

"Van-life" is what devotees who travel in Sprinter, Transit or ProMaster vans, renovated VW campers and Class B motorhomes call living on the road, some full-time. Many work remotely to support their lifestyle or saved up before leaving with plans to later replenish funds. They live and adventure in their vans, sometimes using dry campsites where there may not be electricity or water, but offer great views, solitude and low or no fees.

Van-lifers include singles, young couples, families and retirees. Boutique builds appeal to a younger demographic due to their individuality, for the owner and the build. While RV nomads existed before, it has become increasingly popular due to the wider availability of the internet, which made it possible to work, go to school and perform tasks remotely without the requirement to stay in one place.

Van-life offers an alternative for people who long to get out and see the world. It is not without its challenges, but with all the scenic photos and idealistic videos that appear on YouTube and TikTok, it's easy to see why so many are welcoming this way of living.

CONSIDERING THEIR OPTIONS

Small- to medium-sized boutique builders are located in every state in the United States and most Canadian provinces. If an RV dealer is considering adding a boutique builder to their line, there are questions to ponder:

- Are the units mechanically sound and functional in every way?

- Are the units delivered on time at the agreed upon price?
- Do the units appeal to the dealer's target audience?

We queried some notable builders, and their responses may surprise you. Not all want to move from a DTC (direct-to-consumer) model to dealer distribution. Standardization is needed, which gets the builders closer to big RV manufacturers with higher overhead and timeline pressure. End users are usually willing to wait if delivery runs a little longer, whereas dealers are not as forgiving if units don't show up on time.

Brian Bauman of Rifle, Colorado's Dave & Matt Vans says, "Dave Ramsay and Matt Felser founded the company in 2018. They've grown from two guys building vans in a garage to a full-blown Class B RV manufacturer. They are RVIA members with 25-plus employees building vans in a 40,000-square-foot facility. With over 500 vans on the road, in the last two years they've built over 200. They've sold vans direct to consumers until this year when they shifted to dealer-focused sales. While they still sell direct to customers not serviced by dealers, their focus will be on building intentionally designed vans to be sold through dealers nationwide.

"They won't sell vans that have not been upfitted with their exclusive floorplans," Bauman adds. "DM Vans build Class B RVs on the RAM ProMaster chassis in three models that we call Lifestyle Vehicles. The LV 3 is built on the 139-inch ProMaster chassis, while the LV5 is on the 159-inch chassis in two floorplans, the LV5.1 and LV5.2. Finally, the LV7, our largest van, is built on the 159-inch extended ProMaster chassis in two floorplans, the LV7.1 and LV7.2. All vans are competitively priced and built with everything you need and nothing you don't. The owners and over half our team have lived in or currently live van-life, so when we say we know what someone needs in a van, we know because we have lived in and used them."

Riverside, California's Grech RV produces Class B motorhomes with an emphasis on restyling. Their 165,000-square-foot facility has production lines necessary to supply 60 dealers – including Alpin Haus RV in New York and New Jersey; Bretz RV in Idaho and Montana; Campers Inn with locations nationwide; New York's Colton RV General RV's 14 locations; Giant RV in California; La Mesa RV in Florida, California, Arizona and New Mexico; McClain's RV SuperStores in Texas and Oklahoma; and National Indoor RV Centers with six locations across the U.S., among others.

The Swickard Auto Group, which includes Mercedes-Benz dealerships in Anchorage, Alaska; Palo Alto, San Rafael and Thousand Oaks, California; Wilsonville, Oregon; Austin, Texas; and Seattle, Washington; also founded Out & Upfitters in Gladstone, Oregon, to perform van conversions for their stores.

Storyteller Overland in Birmingham, Alabama, offers Sprinter and Ford Transit-based adventure vans. Their MODE series features "see through pricing" – set pricing at each level of modification. This enables customers to pay the same for a Storyteller Overland adventure van in California as they would in Alabama with no haggling and they can pick up their van from the dealership closest to them, according to the company. With 32 RV and one new car dealer listed on their website, Storyteller supplies vans to Campers Inn, LA Mesa RV and Van City (Nevada, Montana, Missouri and Colorado) among others.



Boutique builder Adrenaline Vans from Colorado


Winnebago's Revel



California's Vanspeed has four basic designs for the Sprinter 144 and three for the 170.


British Columbia's Wonder Vans



Grit Overland's Ford Transit build



RAM ProMasters are the platform of choice for Dave & Matt Vans.

Quebec City, Canada's Boreal Campers has their EOS ready-to-camp models based on RAM's ProMaster 2500 platform, which they offer through Performance Laurentides, a Chrysler, Dodge, Ram and Jeep dealer in Mont-Tremblant; and VR Soulière, an RV dealer with locations in Lanoraie, Lavaltrie, Sherbrooke, Baie-Saint-Paul and Québec.

Mark Dayley, one of three brothers who founded Washougal, Washington's Grit Overland, is exploring dealership sales, with one unit on Newberg Ford's lot outside Portland, Oregon. "We haven't pushed in this direction, nor have we figured out the margins needed by a dealer," Dayley says. "We did hire a salesperson that used to run one of the top Mercedes-Benz dealerships in the U.S., so it might be a possibility in the future.

"We would need to create a model with options, with all systems included, that was available in different iterations – say number of seats or how many it sleeps – but this would limit the amount of personalization. It would not be a full custom build."

RVIA certified and a participant in both Mercedes-Benz and Ford's Quality Vehicle Modifier programs, Grit Overland can sell on dealer lots. Insurance companies and banks are another aspect that Dayley mentions, and both ask "who's building it?" when a consumer is looking for a loan. He says he's concerned what happens down the road, when an adventure van is used and subject to an RV loan, or it can only be sold to a cash buyer when no Blue Book evaluation exists.

Grit Overland's position as a boutique builder is one where used vehicles don't last on the market very long, and often sell for more than new. Dayley sees value in only producing 150 to 250 vans a year versus thousands.

"We see where they get to the end of a model year and liquidate their inventory, which causes unsold units to have to compete on price and depreciate," Dayley says. "This is not the way we want to conduct business."

Another aspect that is often overlooked is suppliers, and here Dayley says if they find a component that fails, he's not locked in to using it. He can change the component or the supplier if the problem persists, something large RV manufacturers may not be able to do.

"A list exists in the industry with approved parts that can be used in manufacturing," he says. "If we find a product that isn't up to our standards, we may want to use one that isn't listed but that we've found to be of higher quality. Just like a boutique builder, that manufacturer may not be able to supply products for testing, or the cost is prohibitive."

Warranties are another issue, and Dayley cautions that proprietary systems that only the manufacturer or trained dealership personnel can repair may lead to increased downtime. "We looked at it from a consumer standpoint, and who wants to have their van sitting in a shop for weeks and months, when it could've been remedied by using commonly available parts and systems that most techs understand, and that can be fixed in a few hours? This is what leads to frustration and an unpleasant customer experience."

NO DEALER DISTRIBUTION

One of the most popular Ford Transit builders is Blue Springs, Missouri's Vandoit, which is not unexpected with their close proximity to Ford's Kansas City assembly plant and relationship with the automaker. Despite years of van conversions and leasing through the Kline Companies, Vandoit does not sell to RV dealers and prefers to sell direct to consumers. According to Brent Kline, Vandoit's founder, "It's too difficult to control the buyer experience. Deliveries don't take place properly, and it doesn't work at the dealer level. Training is a big part of Vandoit's customer experience, so much so that we have a two-day delivery process they go through with each of our customers.

"We can make changes on the fly if a customer decides they want something different," Kline adds. "Things may have changed, or maybe they've seen a configuration that they like better. Our modular components make it possible to switch things around, something a dealer can't do. They won't understand the options that are available, nor do some fully understand van-life. For example, we have our own in-house vinyl graphics, and if there's a look they want, we can make it happen."

For dealers, the critical advice is: Do your homework. Adventure Van Expos and Overland Expos take place in many parts of the country where you can meet boutique builders and examine their builds. Some may invite you to tour their facilities to see vans being converted. If you aren't knowledgeable about the build process, take someone along who is. A cabinet-maker may not translate into a boutique van builder, so don't be dazzled by the build's appearance. You want to know all the systems are sound, and that they can be repaired remotely if the customer is miles away from their facility or yours. Given the popularity of adventure vans and van-life, their popularity will continue to grow over the years to come, especially as younger generations embrace them. RVP

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- Increase customer trust and transparency and decrease RECT times using technology
- Turn service writers/advisors into upsell machines

Digital Marketing/BDC

- Step-by-step guide to implement a powerful BDC
- How to use AI for content creation

Dealer/GM

- Techniques to assess your response to the current marketplace with a checklist for Phase 2 of resetting and renewing dealership operations.
- Cybersecurity – emerging threats, privacy and security in the cloud, establishing and maintaining a security-minded culture, and steps to take after an intrusion.

Sales

- How to hire, develop and manage a high performing sales manager.
- Successfully selling products and services from a servant perspective

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YEAR-ROUND LIVING

East to West's ALTA Xtreme 365 is a Canadian inspiration that can withstand the cold.

BY TONY KINDELSPIRE

Affordable housing – or lack thereof – is an issue that is front and center in many metropolitan areas. And not just in the United States – north of the border, too.

"We've been talking about this for years as a real need," says Al Robinson, co-owner with his wife, Stacy, of Great Canadian RV. The "this" he was referring to is East to West's ALTA Xtreme 365, which he and his wife played an integral part in developing.

"Trailers are expensive, and when you only have three seasons to utilize it – it sure would be nice to utilize your investment year-round. So, that was one of the concepts," Robinson says. "And a big problem that we have up here, at least in Ontario, are the housing prices. Prices have just gone through the roof – I'm going to guess that the average house prices are $600,000 and up."

"And that's at an entry level," Stacy adds. "We probably field two to three calls a day: 'I want a trailer that I can live in.' These are not supposed to be lived in, but you can use it year-round."

The couple have owned Great Canadian RV since 2012 and in 2020, it was named Canadian RV Dealer of the Year. While buying the store was Stacy's introduction to the RV business, Al has been involved in various capacities for more than four decades and has known Pete Liegl, head of Forest River, since 1985.

So, Al called his old friend and told him about the couple's idea for a true year-round coach. Liegl liked the idea and brought in Eric Sharp, a senior general manager with Forest River and the co-general manager of East to West with Lisa Liegl Rees.

"Al and I were talking about how they're having those issues with housing up there and something like this would be great, and then light bulbs started going off in my head," Sharp says. "We already had the basic everything except for the walls being 3-inch. So, it wasn't that hard."

The result is the East to West ALTA Xtreme 365, which is designed for year-round use.

"I just got to thinking that we could go a little thicker on the walls and stuff, and add a little more insulation," Sharp says. "Cold weather is the biggest problem, and I knew we already had the closed bellies and all that stuff, and we just had a few things to change. It wasn't a real big change, but things just started



Increasing the thickness of the walls and insulation helps make the ALTA Xtreme 365 warm enough to live in year-round.

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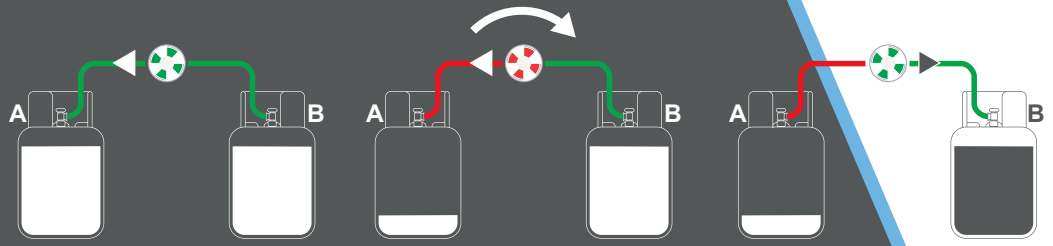
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Storage is hidden in different spots throughout the ALTA Xtreme 365.

clicking when he mentioned that, and I just don't think anybody's ever thought of it, the way that he presented it."

"One of our big things was insulation," Al says. "So, it has 3/8-inch thick sidewalls, including the slideout wall; 5 1/2-inch vacuum-bonded wall on the ceiling, and it's tapered. We have double Azdel, so we have Azdel on the outside wall as well as on the inside wall, so they say that gives us an R value of about R-36, and it's a high-density foam that's in it. From a heat source standpoint, we have two A/Cs on the roof with the heater coil in them, and then the 40,000-BTU furnace and then the electric fireplace, so those are the four sources of heat. We also put heat trace wire in with the plumbing, so the water lines are heated; and the vinyl underbelly is also insulated as well, so it makes for a nice, heated compartment down there. The heat coils in the A/C units spread the heat throughout the duct work."

East to West built four prototypes of the ALTA Xtreme 365 and Great Canadian got the first one. Other dealers will also be receiving models, Sharp says, and more floorplans are likely to follow.

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"What's interesting about this compared to a standard ALTA travel trailer [is] it picks up about another foot in head room inside the unit, so it really feels big and airy, and the slide outs are that much taller as well," Robinson says. "Weight-wise, it weighs in at about 8,600 pounds, so towable by most half-ton trucks."

Sharp says the potential for Canadians and other people who live in extreme temperatures at least part of the year to embrace the unit is strong. And people who live in certain parts of the United States – which have seen ridiculously high temperatures this summer – may love the unit for the same reason.

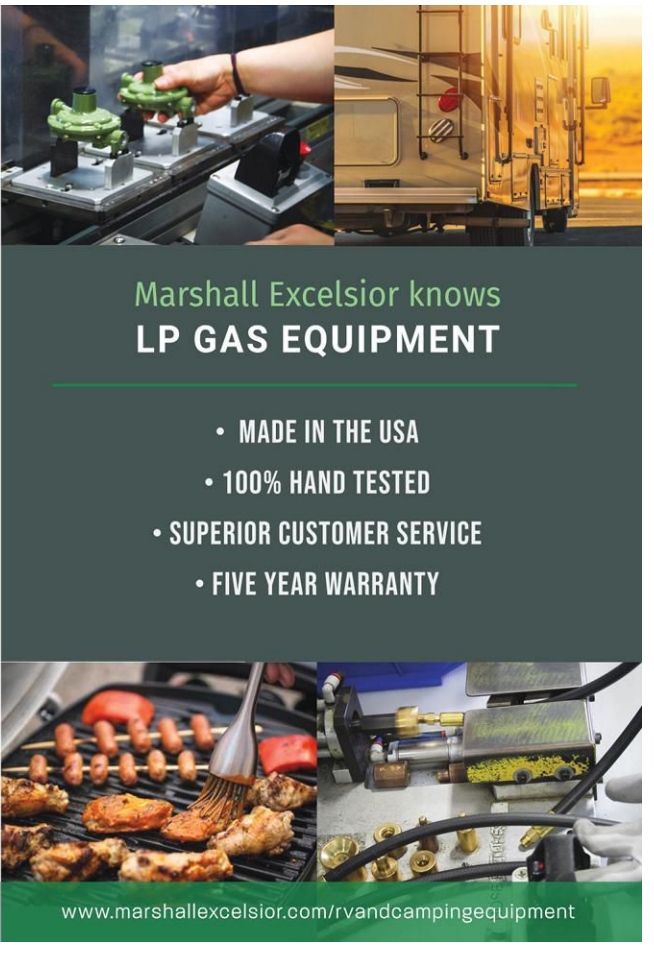
"Our customers are telling us that's something they want, and they've been telling us that's something they wanted for a number of years, quite frankly," Stacy says. "There's a lot of applications – there could be auxiliary housing, or perhaps an elderly parent can stay on-site and be comfortable. Young people who are looking to get started out could potentially purchase something like this quite affordably and build up their credit…There's a lot of different potential applications. Our local government is quite interested in it." RVP

Features of East to West's ALTA Xtreme 365

In addition to the aforementioned features, the 35-foot travel trailer also includes:

- **101-inch-wide body and 96-inch interior height**
- **Dual-pane windows**
- **Full-sized residential appliances**
- **Washer/dryer prep**
- **53-gallon freshwater tank**
- **30-gallon black water tank**
- **60-gallon grey water tank**
- **4G LTE/Wi-Fi prepped antenna with 40-inch smart TV**
- **Sound bar with marine-grade speakers**
- **200-Watt roof-mounted solar panels**
- **King-size bed in primary bedroom**





PROSPEROUS PETE'S RV

The New England dealership credits its growing success to the work of its Mid-Atlantic regional sales and finance manager, plus its eye for diverse opportunities.

BY STEPHANIE PATRICK







Kevin Thomas says he received his figurative "gold medal" last year, when he was named the Mid-Atlantic regional sales and finance manager of Pete RV Center's newly acquired stores in Virginia and South Carolina.

The dealership's three stores in Salem and Chesapeake, Virginia, and North Charleston, South Carolina, represent one-third of Pete's empire spanning eight states. For Thomas, they also allow him to showcase his more than 11 years of experience in the industry. Expanding while maintaining a local mindset has brought Pete's RV the greatest success in its more than 40-year history. Revenue exceeds $200 million and is on target to keep growing, possibly with more acquisitions.

"My vision for Pete's RV is to help grow us to be a better first choice for the consumers in our area," Thomas says.

Based out of the Salem location, Thomas previously worked with owners of American Family RV in opening a new location in 2018, after owning a car dealership in Arizona and being in management at a big-box outdoor store, when family obligations called him back to Virginia.

In car sales, he focused on fulfilling customers' usually immediate needs. RV sales allow him to focus on fun, he says, including learning whether shoppers want to travel to the mountains, the beach or a lake – not just the sales lot.

"We've taken a more hands-on approach to getting the word out and doing more in the community; boots on the ground-type of soliciting to customers," Thomas says. "That includes being in the campgrounds and having these off-site shows (with music).

"We're making it a fun experience, instead of being just 'Hey, let's go look at an RV'," he says.

Those activities usually garner loyalty and referrals, particularly among younger customers. Jay Flight 264BH layouts are particular favorites among the blue-collar customers in Charleston, Thomas says. The average customer in Virginia and South Carolina is in their 40s or 50s – but the age is dropping. More customers want larger fifth wheels such as Jayco's Pinnacle, with second bedrooms for children and an increasing amount of technology.

"We are very lucky to have Kevin Thomas pushing us to success," says Pete's co-owner Chad Shepard, whose parents purchased the original Pete's RV dealership in Vermont in 1983 with Fleetwood and Shasta towables. "His ability to communicate, desire to win and the way he mentors his staff makes him a great role model for everyone at the dealership."

Thomas says his own experience as an African American in the RV industry also gives him a unique perspective and an opportunity. While he went camping with his parents as a child, he says such pursuits weren't typical within his community.

He often wears a Black Folks Camp Too (BFCT) T-shirt in support of Earl B. Hunter Jr.'s organization (Pete's RV is a Unity Blaze member of BFCT) and is usually asked questions about it and camping in general. He's often sporting it while at Virginia Tech University tailgate parties.







Kevin Thomas



Pete's RV recently won multiple awards at the Jayco Dealer Homecoming in Las Vegas.

Thomas challenges the industry to work harder to tap into just 10% of the minority buyer pool that's been ignored for decades."

"It's education of availability," he says. The dealership is also reaching out to community groups and sponsoring youth sports teams.

That goes for the industry, too. Thomas challenges the industry to work harder to tap into just 10% of the minority buyer pool that's been ignored for decades.

"That turns into millions of dollars that are not being utilized," he says. "And at the same time, you are helping people spend more family time."

Thomas does see progress in the industry and sees many organizations are raising awareness of the need for more diversity. Pete's has several minorities in leadership positions throughout the company.

"They've embraced me, and they've given me the opportunity...," he says. "My expertise has proven that I belong."

EYES ON EXPANSION

Along with diversity in leadership, Pete's RV includes all areas of possibility as it eyes expansion opportunities.

"We are looking for demographic diversity, geographic diversity and cultural diversity," Shepard says. "These are all qualities we consider when understanding the potential customer market for expansion."

The dealership has a long history of selling to locals and Canadians. It began searching for acquisitions in about 2009, when the owners realized the dealership could grow more quickly and increase its purchasing power by expanding outside the state.

Pete's first deal was in 2011 for the former Rollin-On RV in Schererville, Indiana, from Paul Craven, who wanted to retire after nearly 40-plus years in the business. Located 35 miles from Chicago, it appealed to Pete's because Rollin-On was also a Keystone dealer and offered Cougar, Montana, Passport and other brands. It's close proximity to Elkhart, Indiana, also enticed Pete's. The Indiana store's sales have tripled, and its staff has grown to 40 in the past 12 years. It includes Forest River Cherokees and No Boundaries, Keystone Bullets and Cougars, and Jayco Eagles and Jay Feathers.



"The biggest surprise is how hard it is to manage remotely," Shepard says. "(We tried to) put a good manager in place and manage from Vermont, but we quickly realized we have to be there more often to build the culture that has led to our success."

Shepard, who now co-owns Pete's along with his cousins, Todd McGinnis and Scott Borden, travels roughly 300 days a year to Pete's store sites and runs the Schererville store's sales department.

The dealership's second purchase was Van's RV Center in South Windsor, Connecticut, near Hartford, in 2015.

"We had a lot of customers in that area, so it was a way (to give) the customers better service," says Shepard about the deal, which took about two years of Shepard's pursuit to secure. The appeal was its Jayco-exclusive relationship and that it offered both the Jayco towable and driveable options. Since the purchase, Pete's sales have increased more than 400%.

Dealership acquisitions in Plainville, Massachusetts, near Boston (2018); in Providence, Rhode Island, to add more Forest River products; and in Mountville, Pennsylvania, near Harrisburg (2020), to add more Jayco products also proved successful.

The latter purchase allowed Pete's to host the Jayco display at the Hershey RV Show in 2021, an extremely profitable event for Pete's.

"It was fun; it was bigger than I thought," Shepard says of the Hershey show. "It was harder than I thought."

Pete's bought a second Pennsylvania location in 2022, shortly after the purchase of the South Carolina store and before buying the two Virginia locations in a joint sale.

The Greencastle, Pennsylvania, store provides Pete's a location midway between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. Former owner Eric Kendle continues to run the high-volume sales department, offering a wide range of brands from Forest River, Coachman, Jayco and Entegra Coach.

Pete's, which also owns Airstream of Vermont and Camper Liquidators in Indiana, made its most ambitious purchases by expanding into South Carolina and later Virginia.

Shepard says the owners sought stores where consistent year-round sales are possible.

The Virginia stores have good service capacity, and about 50% of Pete's total business is service now. That location alone has 12 service bays – and Shepard wants it to increase.

"That's why we bought these stores that are four hours apart, so we can service our customers no matter where they're camping," says Shepard, referring to the distance between most stores.

Looking toward the near future, Shepard says Pete's is building a store in Saco, Maine. It will include a state-of-the-art service center to serve the state's coast, as well as the large groups of RV travelers who visit Maine each year.

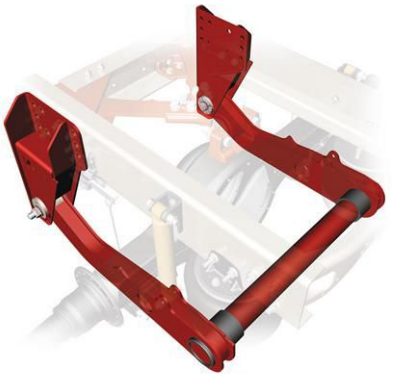
"The goal of myself and my partners is to continue to grow in dealership locations as well as use technology to help us provide high-level customer satisfaction on the service side," Shepard says. RVP



REVVED UP FOR A NEW TYPE OF SUSPENSION

The V-Series by Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp. takes what Class A consumers love about an independent front suspension and brings it within reach, with a lower price tag.

BY JENNIFER KING



Formed with the crimped and welded transverse beam, the U-shaped assembly enhances stability, FCCC says.

Imagine knowing a top-tier technology exists that seems nearly impossible to surpass, but like the turtle who overcame the hare, the dogged pursuit of rising to that level becomes a finish line that grows closer and closer.

That's how Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp. (FCCC) went after – and achieved – their new V-Series Suspension System for Class A RVs. Seeking the same smooth ride, stability and control of an independent front suspension – but without the steep price tag – was a tall order, but something the company says it has accomplished.

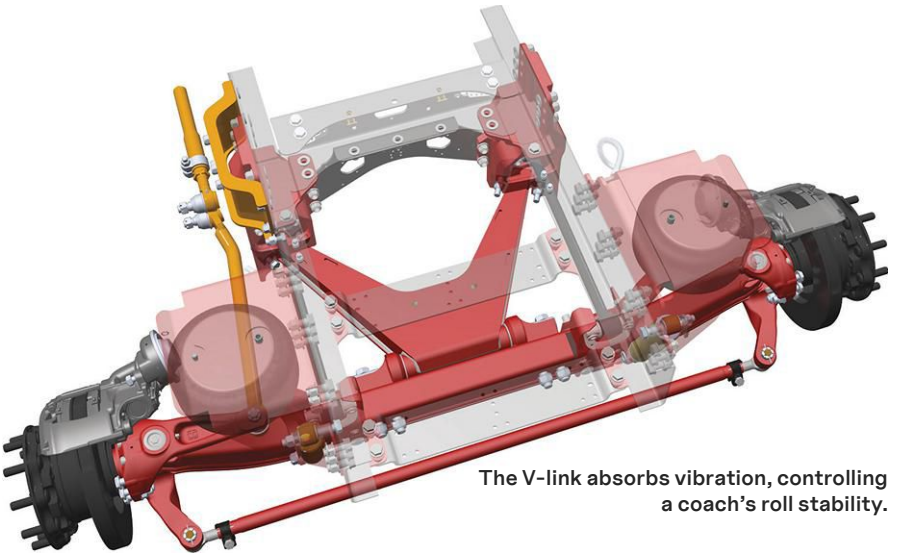
"It's actually been in design for quite a while. The goal was to not only improve what our current entry-level system was – which is our trailing arm suspension – we wanted to improve upon that, but giving an IFS-like ride for everyone," says Bryan Henke, manager of product marketing. "Everyone wants independent front suspension. Well, it's expensive. So this design, we truly had to look at it and we came up, quite honestly, with a new category. This is a system that operates like an independent front suspension but retains the value and basic construction like a beam axle. So it has the best of both worlds."

The V-Series pairs the V-Ride, which is the RV rear suspension, with the VFS front suspension. The South Carolina-based company says the V-Series creates a balanced driving system with increased stability, anti-dive braking, roll stability and eliminates bump steer.

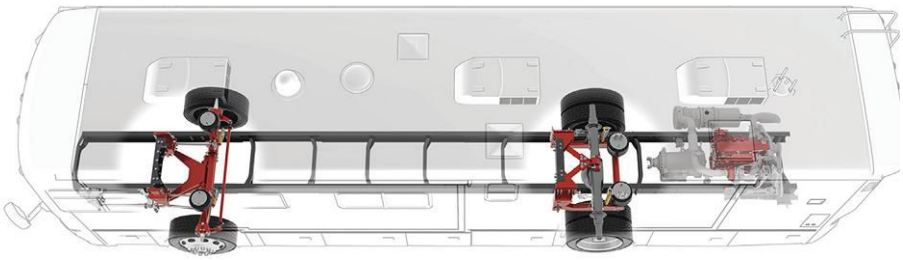
According to FCCC, VFS gets its name from the V-shaped linkage design, which is called the V-link. "The V-link absorbs vibration and forces to control up to 70% of the coach's roll stability, allowing the outboard-mounted air bags and large SACHS shocks to play a larger role in creating a premium ride," per FCCC's website.

"Not only did we design a new front suspension called the VFS…we wanted for the first time [for] these two suspensions to work together for the first time in the RV industry," Henke says. "The front and rear suspension and Class A diesels are tuned and balanced and work together.

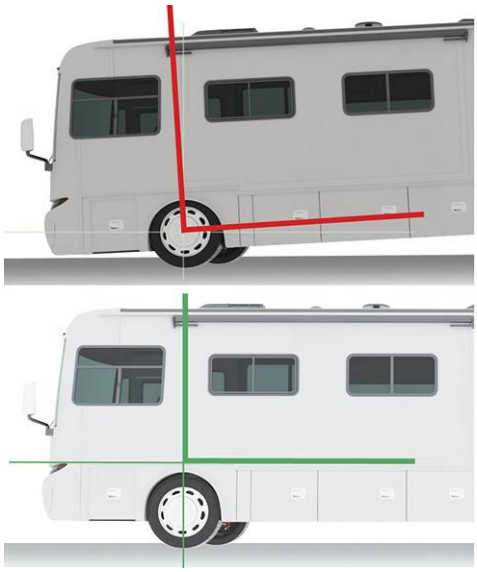
"That's why we call it the V-Series



The V-link absorbs vibration, controlling a coach's roll stability.



Instead of the suspension going up through an arc, it goes up and down like an independent front suspension.



The suspension moves up and down, similar to an IFS, and prevents diving during braking.

because it literally works together and it's amazing."

When an end user graduates into the Class A units, Henke says this is the opportunity to experience performance akin to the higher-end Class As with independent front suspension.

"Our previous suspension that's still in production today, it's been around since the mid-90s…We got to the point of how do we continue to elevate the game?" Henke says. "And so we at FCCC designed and developed this new VFS front suspension, turning into the V-Series – [the] first time that anybody has designed a specific RV suspension for the front. It's truly a game-changer."

With the V-Series in development for the past several years, FCCC did a soft launch last year with a limited capacity introduced to the market. The company, which has more than 1,000 employees at its Gaffney, South Carolina, facility, is now poised for a full launch.

"It is absolutely a good time to help incentivize those that aspire to get into the category that maybe they would've questioned it, but now they have this extra enhancement," Henke says. "It's potentially a differentiator enough that if somebody test drives one compared to their current coach or a gas coach, it's definitely a gauge that could incentivize the customer to purchase earlier than maybe they would've under the current conditions."

The typical Class A demographic has been baby boomers, Henke says, but that pool of customers is shrinking. The number of millennials and Gen X getting into Class Bs and Class Cs has been growing, and the potential for them to aspire to move into a Class A diesel isn't far behind.

"We've seen the B market grow something crazy and the class C market's doing well. Those consumers still want to get to the next level," says Jeremy Buckmeier, RV and commercial bus product manager at FCCC. "You have to get up there before you get to IFS [independent front suspension] in general. But these shorter coaches are becoming more and more popular and they want to have that same 40- to 45-foot coach ride quality of independent front suspension. So this is really another good time that the shorter coaches can get a better ride quality than historically they've been able to get."

Explaining how the new VFS works, Henke says to imagine a parallelogram – instead of the suspension going through an arc, it goes up and down like an independent front suspension. The V-link in the middle provides the stability and gives the driver control.

"When we designed it, our engineers have the V-Ride and the VFS react the same, so they're tuned and balanced together, which is quite honestly a first," Henke says.

The FCCC teams expected to have some units with the new V-Series on display at "America's Largest RV Show" in Hershey, Pennsylvania in September.

"If I was going to put a bow on it, it's having the performance of an independent front suspension but very cost effective, and that's key in today's market," Henke says. "If we can give you that performance with it being very cost effective…that's what's exciting about it." RVP

Additional Information on V-Series Features

- Anti-diving braking: The VFS four-bar linkage controls the front of the coach so it won't go "nose down" when braking, FCCC says. The suspension moves up and down similar to an IFS.
- Long-life bushings: Made from AISI 4140 Chromoly (chromium-molybdenum alloy steel), FCCC's proprietary bushings are durability tested for over 150,000 miles.
- Bump steer: VFS uses steering architecture and bell crank to reduce bump steer, which is found similarly with a traditional trailering-arm front suspension.
- U-shaped assembly: A single-piece, U-shaped assembly is formed with the crimped and welded transverse beam, which FCCC says enhances stability.
- V-Ride available for various GVWRs: V-Ride configurations are available for GVWRs up to 24,000 pounds.
- VFS large, custom-tuned SACHS shocks: Larger diameter shocks on front and rear suspensions use larger pistons, which FCCC says allows flexibility in suspension tuning.
- VFS outboard-mounted volumetric air springs with ping tanks: These 12.5-inch springs with ping tanks improve stability.

POWER SOLUTIONS FROM THE OUTBACK

How OzX plans to change the game in the United States with its off-grid-capable DCX Power Solution.

BY JENNIFER KING

After caravanning hundreds of thousands of miles across Australia, Andrew Huett knows at least one thing – how to create a power solution that will withstand the elements.

"It's a very, very rough and very remote country," says Huett, CEO of OzX Corp. Tuning into his Zoom interview with RV PRO from Melbourne, Huett points to a photo that shows a MacGyver-esque tube taped to a vehicle and rigged up into a travel trailer, through which air conditioning flowed. Huett says, "The key reason I want to show you this picture is OzX was born on this day through necessity."

Fast forward several years, now OzX designs and manufactures power and connectivity solutions, bringing decades of automotive experience to serve OEMs. From those humble days to now, this Australian-born brand is making headway in North America through its representation by Dave Carter & Associates. As a national distributor since 1978, Dave Carter & Associates has worked with OzX since 2021 and is preparing the launch of the U.S. version of DCX, the flagship product from OzX that's been in use in Australia for more than five years.

"We're six years into the business," Huett says. "We're very successful now in the Australian and New Zealand market selling electrification products that pivot the industry not only just from fossil-fueled solutions but also to an era of convenience, which has always been the target.

"[This is] an era of convenience that allows you to turn your kettle on, boil water, put the air conditioning on and do this in a carbon-neutral, off-grid, boondocking solution, which is just unheard of."

The OzX answer? Meet the DCX Power Solution – designed for mobile use, it manages all power needed for an RV and similar applications, operating on a 51.1VDC platform. Lighter weight and with a smaller footprint, the DCX Power Solution has two main components: the external mounted DCX Battery and the internal fitted DCX Power System.

That DCX Power System includes a pure sine wave inverter that can deliver 6,000 watts/240VAC continuously. Because of this high-power output, RVs can operate standard domestic appliances simultaneously. This system provides three ways to charge, OzX says: 240VAC grid (or generator), DC-DC and solar. With the DCX Power Solution, the DCX Power System takes up to 8,000 watts of solar power to either charge the DCX Battery, power loads connected to the DCX Power System, or balance both.



Convenience & Ease of Use

The DCX Power System is plug and play, the company says – it can be swapped out for a replacement unit if needed, no tools required and makes installation easier for OEMs.

"We've got a big roadmap ahead," Huett says. "But the most important part of bringing the business to the U.S. via Dave Carter is we're now bringing over five years of product integrity out of Australia now into the U.S., and bringing the convenience into your standard industry but also your boondocking industry…will really flourish from this kind of solution."

Huett explains that in Australia, 60% of all sales are boondocking.

"I think the reality is, COVID has taught people being connected to the grid isn't as reliable as we once thought,"



Huett says. "We want to be free; we want to be away; we want to have a feeling of independence and connection back to nature. I think RVing has always been that – what people are really chasing is freedom, independence and the ability to connect with the real world, which is nature.

"But people also want to be able to take their home lifestyle with them. Everyone wants to be in touch with nature…but they want to come back to their RV or travel trailer, put the air conditioning on and sit back and relax."

From a dealer standpoint, David Carter, president and CEO of Dave Carter & Associates, says the plug-and-play aspect of this system is a critical feature.

"The customer doesn't really want to know it exists because it just works," he says. "I think that's something OzX wanted – something so simple, something that was just set it, forget it."

Huett also notes the importance of the power system being mounted to the chassis – not inside the unit.

"Our vision really is about a vehicle architecture in which the living quarters sits on top as opposed to putting technology throughout the living quarters to achieve the same result," he says.

Jordan Menz, product development manager at Dave Carter & Associates,



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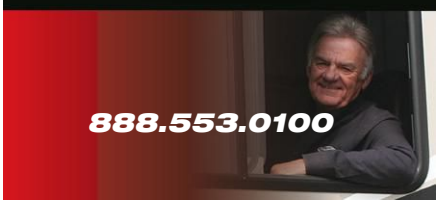
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adds that OzX worked directly with OEMs in Australia when developing this product – so they knew from the get-go how an RV plant is setup and operates. In some cases, production lines would have had to be shut down to accommodate adding on this type of power system.

"You have that foresight from their team," Menz says about OzX, "to develop it in a way that it can fit into the production process in a mass scale."

Creating Sustainable Power Off-Road

The initial target for the DCX Power Solution will be travel trailers and fifth wheels, says Mike Mohr, Indiana sales manager at Dave Carter & Associates.

As for how the DCX Power Solution works in conjunction with solar, Huett says it was specifically built around solar, so end users can choose to run completely off solar, or a blend of the battery power plus solar.

"The key part is that we take solar directly to the load. So that sunshine is coming onto your travel trailer is prioritized to all the loads – that's highly efficient to do it that way," Huett says, "especially if you're running an air conditioner during the day, that's exactly what you want. And then the design of the battery is to get you through the nighttime."

Ian Bruton, chief operating officer of OzX, adds that the power solution's robustness is an important feature and was tested heavily on rough, corrugated roads.

"We've got clients that go out into the wilderness for many months at a time on corrugated roads, and some of those corrugated roads are the roughest in the world," he says. "They expected to get to the tip of Australia where there's absolutely nothing but wilderness and nature and animals and still be able to have their lights and be able to cook a meal on their cooktops and fridges running. So that's a great testament to the product, for sure."

The Melbourne-based business currently has 12 employees, but that is expected to at least double in the next year, Bruton says.

Thankfully for OzX, supply chain difficulties have been minimal, but finding good employees still proves to be a challenge.

"I think it's just a change in the dynamics of employment," Huett says. "We're in a new building and we're quite an appealing technology company – we do attract the right talent. But you can certainly see that the dynamics or challenges in manufacturing is more personnel-based than supply-based now."

One of the biggest selling points of this kind of power solution is knowing you can go boondocking while having minimal, if any, carbon impact, OzX says.

"People understand this is without a doubt the right way to go," Huett says. "It's not only a better consumer experience but you don't need to plug in every day you use it – it doesn't create carbon."

Carter echoes this – adding the latest statistics that show millennials tend to care more about sustainability and the impact they have on the environment.

"When you have the option of doing it, and it doesn't cost you any more work, why would you be against it?" Carter notes. "At the end of the day, I think we're seeing a pivotal point for the industry, just like we see in the automotive industry." RVP

COMBATING RECT WITH A DMS SOLUTION

Don Miller of Integrated Dealer Systems explains how to 'make it make sense' for your dealership team.

BY RV PRO STAFF



RECT is a major focus for dealerships – getting customers in, repairs squared away and back on the road is top priority. RV PRO asked Don Miller, senior data consultant with Integrated Dealer Systems (IDS), how reports from a DMS can help dealerships create efficiency. With more than 30 years of experience, Miller works with dealerships on training, consulting and analytical services and is the creator of IDS' RECT report.

1. What should a dealer's first step be when a customer comes in for a repair?

The all-important walkaround (or as some call it, triage) should be the service writer's first step when the customer arrives for their appointment. Go around the unit with the customer, take good notes of all the customer's concerns or requests and take pictures of any affected parts or components. Keep the customer informed of the possible costs (diagnostic charges if applicable) and the estimated time frame to complete the initial diagnosis.

2. What can a service department do to help move a customer's RV along in the repair process?

Communicate effectively. Promptly updating the dealership's DMS with good notes and complete information is a must. This will allow the technicians to properly translate the work that needs to be done. Based on the technician's input, the parts department personnel will know what parts are needed. If the DMS is updated at every step, the repair process can continue to move forward. Also, the service writer (or anyone at the dealership) can provide the customer with updates on the status of their repair.

3. How can reports from a DMS help prevent bottlenecks?

Reports won't prevent them, but they can help identify the main bottlenecks – typically warranty coverage and out-of-stock parts. DMS reports will reflect the average cycle times of work orders completed during a specific time (typically a month). This average should only include the work orders of the dealership's customers, filtering out any internal work orders. By comparing this average to the average cycle times of work orders with warranty coverage and those with out-of-stock parts completed during the same time frame, a dealer can quantify the actual impact these bottlenecks have on the dealership's cycle times and determine where to concentrate their efforts.

4. What insights can a Repair Event Cycle Time (RECT) report help a dealership learn about its process?

A detailed RECT report not only provides cycle time averages of the main bottlenecks but also dissects the bottlenecks down to their individual components. These components can help the dealership better pinpoint the weakest link (or links) in their process, such as triage setups, warranty authorizations, internal communication or customer communication.

Another benefit of the RECT reports offered by DMS vendors is the historical trends they provide. Tracking a dealership's cycle time averages over time presents a dealer with the ability to visualize their progress and determine if their efforts exhibited the intended results.

5. How can comparing these reports against those of other dealers in the area help with forecasting?

As with many aspects of the RV industry, Repair Event Cycle Times are seasonal and can vary depending on which region the dealership is located. So many of the RECT reports provide regional historical averages in addition to a national average. Comparing a dealership's RECT to that of other dealerships in the same region over the same time frame can provide important historical insight. This can be a valuable tool when forecasting cycle times.

6. How can a service department manager encourage the implementation of a DMS and get buy-in from the team?

It hinges on communication and transparency. Talk to every team member and ask them what they're currently struggling. It's paramount to ensure everyone is heard because their concerns will give you insights into how a DMS can address their specific challenges. Once you understand their challenges, you're in a better position to articulate the benefits of the DMS in a context that resonates with their day-to-day experiences. This personalized approach makes it evident to the team that the proposed solution isn't a top-down decision, but a thoughtful response to their expressed needs. RVP

RVDA Bets On Expertise, Insight & Education

The association's upcoming event will offer dealer attendees workshops on digital marketing, improving service and sales, and more.

BY RV DEALERS ASSOCIATION (RVDA)

A selection of new speakers is set to host educational workshops at the 2023 RV Dealers Convention/Expo. The convention/expo will take place Nov. 6-10 at Paris Las Vegas and brings together North America's top dealership personnel for a week of in-person networking and continuing education workshops.

"The RVDA Convention/Expo is designed for dealers/GMs, sales, fixed ops, F&I and digital marketing professionals who want to improve their performance," said RVDA President Phil Ingrassia. "We are excited to be at the Paris Las Vegas, which has a number of new restaurants and attractions and the rebranded Horseshoe (formerly Bally's), which also is part of the convention room block, has upped its game as well."

The event is sponsored by RVDA of the U.S., RVDA of Canada and the Mike Molino RV Learning Center. Highlights will be:

DIGITAL MARKETING EXPERT ON HOW TO OPTIMIZE DEALER WEBSITES

Aubrey Amborn will present a workshop on adding a personal touch while leading a consumer on the path to purchase as part of the digital marketing/BDC track scheduled for 3:15-4 p.m., Nov. 8. "Personalize & Scale the Consumer Path to Purchase" creates a better understanding of the modern consumer who has a higher set of expectations than in previous generations. For retailers to succeed in an environment where rising consumer expectations clash with staffing shortages, they need to take advantage of online tools that convert their website into their smartest, most effective salesperson.

During the workshop, attendees will learn:

- Steps to making your website work smarter and harder, using the tools that are already available
- Ways to personalize the shopper experience by delivering the information each website visitor is looking for, such as inventory availability, service slots and pricing
- Methods to leverage digital word of mouth (social media and online reviews) to stand out online and drive brand equity



Amborn is director of sales for InteractRV. She has built strategic partnership programs with companies like Land 'N' Sea, US Auto Force, Keystone and NTP-STAG that have allowed more turnkey online solutions to service customers with more ease.

LEONARD BUCHHOLZ ON HOW TO IMPROVE SERVICE PROFITS & SALES

Leonard Buchholz, the sales and marketing manager of DealerPRO RV Training, will host a pair of workshops in the fixed operations track at the 2023 RV Dealers Convention/Expo. Buchholz will discuss "7 Steps to Increased Profits in Service" from 8:15-9:15 a.m., Nov. 7. It is impossible to fix all the problems in your service department at once. That's why you break it down into smaller tasks so that you can correct each out-of-line condition, one at a time.

During the workshop, attendees will learn:

- The seven basic steps to profitability
- What causes out-of-line conditions
- The corrective steps necessary to build long-term profitability
- How to build a seven-step action plan to use when they get back to their dealership

From 9-10 a.m., Nov. 9, Buchholz will present "How to Turn Your Advisors Into Sales Experts, Drive Revenue, and Increase Customer Satisfaction." Owners, general managers and service managers will learn how to identify service sales opportunities already present in the service department.

During the workshop, attendees will learn:

- How to increase customer satisfaction with proven communication strategies and techniques
- To use a checklist to determine the effectiveness of your advisors and develop a training strategy to address deficiencies
- How to make a five-step action plan

LIGHTSPEED TEAM ON HOW TO CUT RECT WHILE IMPROVING TRUST

Lightspeed Product Managers Von Anderson and Christopher Hauck will discuss reducing Repair Event Cycle Time (RECT) during a workshop in the fixed ops track. The educational session, "Increase Customer Trust and Transparency and

Decrease RECT Times Using Tech," is scheduled for 3:15-4:15 p.m., Nov. 9. This workshop teaches dealers how to increase transparency, restore trust and forge customer loyalty that will last a lifetime.

During the workshop, attendees will learn about:

- Using video as a prime communication mechanism
- Keeping an efficient and effective calendar that allows for proper technician scheduling and syncing/visibility with the other departments
- Using eSignature to improve the customer experience (social media and online reviews) to stand out online and drive brand equity

Hauck has been at Lightspeed for 23 years and is currently the director of product management. Anderson has been with Lightspeed for 20 years and has worked in a variety of areas including support, implementation and is currently the principal RV product manager.

WHY VIDEO IS A CRUCIAL PART OF MAKING PRESENTATIONS STAND OUT

Tom Gallaher, co-founder of AutosOnVideo.com, will discuss the value of video in the total sales process during the RV Dealers Convention/Expo; his first-time RVDA Convention/Expo presentation is part of the digital marketing/BDC track. From 9-10 a.m., Nov. 9, Gallaher will host the workshop "The Power of Video Merchandising and Personalized Follow-Up." Attendees will learn how to utilize a documented blueprint for complete RV merchandising that incorporates video in sales, follow-up and BDC to stand out from the competition.

During the workshop, attendees will learn:

- A consistent process so each RV is completely merchandised with photos and videos posted the same day on your site and all third-party sites
- Easy-to-follow procedures that take all the guess work out of the process
- A step-by-step process on how to take your dealership to the next level in merchandising including video

Gallaher has worked with dealers, enjoyed exploring vehicles – inside and out – and documented their design, features and benefits in an efficient, consistently reproduceable way, using photos, video and upbeat music.

PRESENTATIONS TO UNVEIL PSYCHOLOGY OF SELLING, LEADING

Dave Brown, a founding partner of Southwestern Consulting, will present three workshops in the sales track on Nov. 9 during the convention/expo. "Navigate: Selling the Way People Want to Buy" is scheduled for 9-10 a.m., Nov. 9. This workshop examines the notion that selling is not about treating people the way you want to be treated; it's about treating people the way they want to be treated.

During the workshop, attendees will learn:



- What are the four distinct psychological buying and selling behavioral types
- How to identify someone's buying behavioral style within seconds of meeting them
- Why saying the wrong thing in the first five seconds can permanently eliminate your chance of ever making a sale
- Which types of advanced closing techniques are most likely to increase the probability of converting someone into a customer.

Next, also on Nov. 9, from 10:15-11:15 a.m., Brown will present "Servant Selling: Closing More Deals and Giving Your Customers Exactly What They Need." Servant selling is a "help others" philosophy that puts your potential customers' needs and desires ahead of your own.

During the workshop, attendees will learn:

- Why approaching sales with a "helping others" perspective gains trust and support
- How to successfully sell your products and services from a servant perspective
- Learn life-changing proven methodologies and ideas with almost 20 years of support that has been tested with tens of thousands of people to make sure it works.

Then, from 2-3 p.m., Brown will deliver "Navigate: Leading People the Way They Want to Be Lead." We need to lead by example, modeling the behavior we want to see in others, and creating a safe and inclusive environment.

During the workshop, attendees will learn:

- The four distinct psychological behavioral types and how to identify someone's style within seconds of meeting them
- How to modify your leadership and communication style to lead the way they like to be led
- Why saying the wrong thing can eliminate your chance of gaining trust and confidence as a leader

KEYNOTE SPEAKER ON CREATING & RETAINING BUSINESS ONLINE

Author, comic and online business expert Brian Carter is scheduled to deliver the keynote address during the opening general session of the 2023 RV Dealers Convention/Expo on Nov. 7. Carter is the No. 1 bestselling author of "The Like Economy," "LinkedIn for Business," "Facebook Marketing" and "The Cowbell Principle." He is an international authority on how organizations can create and retain business using the internet. His 18 years of business success guide The Brian Carter Group, a digital and social marketing agency. Carter's hands-on business experience, cutting-edge insights, and background in improv and stand-up comedy culminate in a keynote speaker and trainer who leaves audiences not only entertained, but also armed with powerful strategies and tactics.

Visit rvda.org/convention for more information and to register for the event. RVP



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

How the owners of Century Chemical Corporation took a 97-year-old company with products that are mainstays in the industry and pushed for growth.

BY JENNIFER KING



Diana Evans, director of marketing (left), Denyse Pontius, president (center), and Pat Pontius, general manager. All photos by Steve Toepp

Everyone knows the saying: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

That mantra definitely rings true for Century Chemical Corporation.

With a 97-year history, a flagship product that's been on the market for more than 50 years, and relationships with suppliers for 40 years or more, Century Chemical certainly knows when it has a good thing going.

Owners Denyse Pontius, president, and her business partner and general manager, Pat Pontius, have been with the company for 18 years and seven years, respectively. In April 2021, the duo purchased Century Chemical from former owner Ed Fetters and since then



the company's revenue has continued to grow. Even this year, with the downturn experienced across the RV industry, the company's revenue is up 9%, Pat says.

"Denyse started in production at Century 18 years ago and she worked her way up. She was office manager before becoming an executive and now she's the boss," he says. "I came from a production background, and they needed production [help]."

Denyse – whose father, David Eller, worked at Century Chemical as well – said she spent time growing up vacuuming the carpets on the weekends.

"I'd come in with my dad [and] we'd guess what product he made that day based on the fragrance in the office," Denyse says.

The Right Mix of Employees

As one of only a few women-run companies in the industry, Diana Evans, recently hired as the director of marketing, credits the company's trajectory with Denyse's extended knowledge of the RV industry.

"Denyse has a lot of great insight to what the vision needs to be, and she has her pulse on the industry," Evans says. "Although we [are] tapped into the RV industry specifically – obviously we're in the hub of Elkhart and we have our connections and we work with many of the RV manufacturers – but as far as the large scope of things, Denyse has been with Century for almost 19 years and her ability and strength to take on the company as her own and then lead everything from there speaks volumes.

"As far as her vision and her leadership, it works because she knows where we need to be and it's just getting there," Evans adds.

With a team of 10 employees the attitude around the Elkhart, Indiana, facility is one of "all hands on deck."

"Essentially, we're not really big. But everybody that works here is really good at what they do," Pat says.

It's a benefit to the company that each of the employees can help with different areas, Evans adds.

"The skills and capabilities that each one of us have, because we have such a vast background, it makes for everybody being able to either hit production, be part of sales, be part of the office management," she says. "So, the way that Denyse hires everybody also says that: 'Can you be part of the team?' It's what makes such a powerful culture for Century."

Finding the right mix of employees can be tricky in their location with a small pool of potential employees.

"In Elkhart it's particularly difficult," Pat says. "You're fighting against these



manufacturers who pay a lot more money. However, what Denyse and I came into with Ed was a culture [where] this is a family company. For example, we pay 100% of all of our employees' insurance."

"Vision and dental too," Denyse adds.

Additional benefits such as vacation days, mental health days, and fun activities like birthday cake, company-wide volunteer days, luncheons once a month and more make Century Chemical an attractive place to work.

"We can make it a place that people want to work, and we lead by example in that way," Pat says.

"And we have very little turnover – slash zero turnover," Denyse says with a laugh. "We want people to build a life here. And we want people to feel they have a family here."

Building Off a Flagship Product

Anyone who owns an RV or works in the RV industry would be hard pressed to not recognize the product Travel Jon. The line consists of dry, water-soluble and liquid waste digesters, bowl cleaner,



and holding tank deodorizer/cleaners that were trademarked in 1967.

"Travel Jon is the oldest holding tank cleaner in the United States," Pat says. "It's been around longer than any of us. And the nice thing about Travel Jon is it's been what it is since the beginning. With Prop 65 and all these things, we've never had to change anything – it was always environmentally friendly. It was always a good product."

Century Chemical also produces Winter Pruf, an antifreeze for winterizing and protecting RVs, and Century Heat Transfer Fluid – a propylene glycol-based product for RV heating systems and solar, hydronic and HVAC units. Both products are GRAS, or "generally recognized as safe," by the United States Food & Drug Administration. Winter Pruf's trademark is 50 years old this year.

Pat points out that the efficacy of the products is what makes them so long-lasting in the market; the company produces more than 400,000 gallons of just one product a year.

The more recently released Supreme Green line is an enzyme-based holding tank treatment that is designed to break down solids in holding tanks, get rid of unpleasant odors and lubricate drain valves, the company says. The product is available in reusable and recyclable packaging, is biodegradable and the water-soluble packets reduce waste.

While Century Chemical has a number of successful products, Pat says they're also developing more. The company makes products for portable sanitation, marine, charter buses, aviation and septic systems in addition to RVs, and has decades of experience in turnkey manufacturing solutions such as contract packaging and private labeling.



"We reach so much more," Evans says, also adding portable toilets to the list. "We have wonderful relationships with them, and wonderful relationships with even the local septic companies, because we offer a product called Bio-Tab. Century is so much more than even RV."

Growth & Giving Back

Investments are being made in the multimillion-dollar company, Pat says, noting a quarter-of-a-million-dollar filling machine that was recently purchased.

"It all goes back into the company. Denyse and I have not given ourselves raises since we bought the company," Pat says. "We're making the same amount of money as we were before we bought it… It's important to us that everybody that works for us feel like they're important and taken care of."



Investing in local charities and groups is important for the company, too, from youth soccer and T-ball teams to the Community Foundation of Elkhart County and first responders, the employees at Century Chemical work to help in different ways. Between their involvement in the RV Industry Association, RV Women's Alliance and local Chamber of Commerce's Business Diversity Initiative Group, Pat and Denyse strive to lead by example in their support of the industry and their community.

"It comes from our hearts. It really is that – one of the core pillars is that we care about people," Evans says. "And obviously it starts from the top and then it goes down, but then it also goes out. And so, we're very mindful…We support the Marine Corps. We're supporting Care Camps…It's the passion behind loving people and being able to plug into that."

"We love the environment too," Denyse says. "And we tell our employees if there's a cause that they're familiar with that speaks to them, we help with that."

Pat says he and Denyse are big proponents of leading by example.

"Whether it's Denyse leading with her work ethic or her heart, or me leading with my work ethic and lack of heart," he says jokingly, adding that he often says: "I'm the hammer and she's the feather."

While neither Pat nor Denyse could have predicted that owning Century Chemical Corporation is where their career trajectories would go, the opportunity continues to speak to them.

"It's not Denyse, it's not me – it's the team," he reiterates. RVP



WHAT ARE YOUNGER FULL-TIME RVERS LOOKING FOR IN AN RV?

BY SCOTT RUSSELL

Full-time RVer demographics have dramatically changed over the last five years. Full-time RVing retirees and snowbirds have now been joined by a variety of working-age RVers, including singles, couples and families. In this article, we will explore what this new demographic of full-time RVers is looking for in an RV to live in, and how the industry is responding to this shift.

The New Wave Of Working-Age RV Dwellers

As much as the post-pandemic world has changed, one of the biggest benefits has been the shift toward online job opportunities and increased online educational options. More people than ever can work and attend school from anywhere they wish, so why not from an RV?

Outdoor recreation popularity has also soared in recent years. People seem to value spending time outdoors and exploring new places now more than in the past. Younger people are ditching the status quo and inventing a new life on the road with greater freedom and excitement than traditional living arrangements.

As more younger full-time RVers have taken the plunge, this lifestyle has become normalized and has gained in popularity. It's a much more acceptable option today to ditch having roots and live more nomadically than it was in years past.

For example, when our family sold it all to begin RV living back in 2015, it was a bit unheard of and just plain misunderstood by many of our friends and family members. Today, there are many traveling families and working couples/singles that we meet out on the road – just as many younger full-time RV travelers as retirees.

The Unique Needs of Younger Full-Time RVers

Working-age full-time RVers and families embracing RV living have different needs than retired RVers. One of the biggest differences in this younger demographic is the ability to work or attend school while on the road. Reliable internet is one of the highest priorities with younger RVers in general, but especially those RVing full-time.

Starlink has emerged as a front-



runner for keeping RVers connected on the go, and some manufacturers are taking note of this trend by incorporating it into certain models. THOR Industries recently began offering a flat high-performance Starlink dish as an add-on option to Airstream, Entegra, Tiffin and Jayco models. While any RVer can obtain a stand-alone Starlink dish for an internet connection, having an integrated, roof-mounted system adds the bonus of connectivity while driving, which is an exclusive benefit of Starlink's In-Motion Dish.

The younger demographic of full-time RVers is also looking for hybrid or convertible workspaces. RV models that include an integrated desk space, fold-out tables or a convertible dresser to desk space are highly desirable features. Convertible office areas save space when not working while providing a comfortable work or school area.

Families on the road are seeking additional sleeping and living spaces. Models that have multiple separate sleeping areas with a large enough living room area for the whole family to sit are the highest in demand with this RVer demographic.

Most Wanted: RV Features That Are High in Demand

What are the specific RV features likely to win the hearts of families and working-age RVers? Let's look at a few key features.

- **Convertible Office Spaces:** Mid-bunk floorplans provide a door for a quiet office environment. Foldable









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master beds create a larger bedroom space with a dresser that converts to a desk space. An integrated desk in the kitchen or living room provides workspace. Toy haulers with flexible garage space for additional sleeping or working areas are a desirable option.

- **More Sleeping Areas:** Lofts increase sleeping spaces while still maintaining a smaller RV footprint. Murphy beds add a sleeping area without sacrificing the living room. Bunk beds or toy hauler garages are also popular options to increase sleeping areas.
- **Additional Storage:** Rear master bedrooms provide room for additional outdoor storage underneath. Large food storage areas, including a pantry and residential-size refrigerator, are highly desired for RV living. A large closet space with washer and dryer hookups for daily laundry needs are also ideal.
- **Upgraded Technology:** Younger RVers in general are drawn to the convenience of app-controlled RV functions such as slides, auto-leveling and awnings.
- **Other Desired Features:** Some manufacturers are beginning to add additional features that are high on full-time RVers' lists such as dishwashers, standard auto-level, upgraded suspension and improved pin boxes. However, some features that RVers desire still aren't widely available. These features include a factory option for disc brakes, the ability to dump tanks from inside the RV, standard awning wind sensors and built-in RV surge protectors.

> **"Younger people are ditching the status quo and inventing a new life on the road with greater freedom than traditional living arrangements."**

RV Models Meeting Younger Demographic's Needs

Here are some examples of design tweaks and new innovations in RV floorplans that meet this unique customer's needs.

- **One-Level Fifth Wheels:** The Columbus River Ranch 392MB by Palomino offers a mid-bunk floorplan perfect for families. One-level living provides complete under-the-coach storage space not widely seen elsewhere.
- **Two Suite Floorplans:** There is a recent trend toward offering two master suites in fifth wheels with a loft over the rear suite. This popular plan provides three separate sleeping spaces with two full bathrooms. An example of this floorplan is the Grand Design Solitude 391DL.
- **Loft Floorplans With Stairs:** Families with smaller children prefer lofts with stairs versus a ladder. A model that packs in loads of family-friendly living and kitchen space while still offering stairs to a spacious double loft is the Montana High Country 377FL from Keystone.
- **Motorhome With Second Bedroom for Kids:** The Fleetwood Fortis 36Y is a game-changing family Class A floorplan. This model offers a unique kid cave, which is a true bunkroom similar to what you can find in many towable RVs.
- **Flexible Bunk/Office Space:** The

Ember 190MSL offers an EmberTrack repositionable bunk system that allows bunks to be raised or removed completely to create a multipurpose office space. This area also has a hatch feature to open the space up with an outdoor view and a screen to keep bugs out. This flexible space can be used as additional storage.

- **Convertible Bedroom Dresser:** A dresser top that slides out to double as a desk space helps RVers use the master bedroom as an office space. The Brinkley Z3100 is an example of a model with this feature.
- **Separate Dedicated Office:** The Shasta Phoenix 373MBRB has a one-of-a-kind floorplan with a bunkroom and a separate mid-RV office space with a door. It's rare to find a dedicated office or private office space like what is offered in this model.
- **Pantry/Office Space:** Have you ever seen an RV pantry so large that it could also serve as an office? The Keystone Alpine 3912DS offers two full suites and an enormous U-shaped counter pantry full of upper and lower cabinets. This space is large enough to double as a private office space with a door.

As full-time RVer demographics continue to shift toward younger working-age couples, singles and families, will the RV industry keep up with the features this age group demands? It's exciting to see the innovations that are now being offered and how customer demands are shaping the future of RV design. One thing is for certain: This new RV living demographic is here to stay. RVP



Scott Russell, his wife, Vanessa, and their 13-year-old daughter have traveled full-time in their RV for eight years. They have worked and homeschooled on the road through 42 states so far. The Russells are freelance travel writers and RV technical writers, RV social media content creators and brand influencers. Find them @theadventuredetour on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and Facebook. They also run two blogs on RVing tips and travel destinations at TheAdventureDetour.com and RVNomadJobs.com.



HOW TO MAKE CAMPING PRODUCT SALES A PROFIT CENTER FOR YOUR DEALERSHIP



BY ERIK DIER, KUMA OUTDOOR GEAR

RV dealerships play an important role in providing their customers with not only the RVs themselves but also the essential accessories and gear that enhance the camping experience. However, to stay competitive, RV dealerships need to recognize an untapped potential – a curated and well-thought-out parts and accessories department. This article will explore the significance of increasing product sales, highlighting the benefits of offering additional camping gear, and outlining strategic measures that can help boost profit. By leveraging these opportunities, RV dealerships can meet an increasing demand to purchase gear by outdoor enthusiasts and create long-term relationships with their existing customers.

Kuma Outdoor Gear is currently in more than 2,000 locations across North America. From smaller dealerships in remote towns to multilocation dealerships that span state lines, we have seen what works and what doesn't. So, how can you increase sales in this area of your dealership? Here is a list of things you can easily do efficiently and cost effectively to increase sales and keep your customers coming back for more.

1. Make it convenient. By offering additional camping gear in the parts department, both existing and potential RV owners visiting



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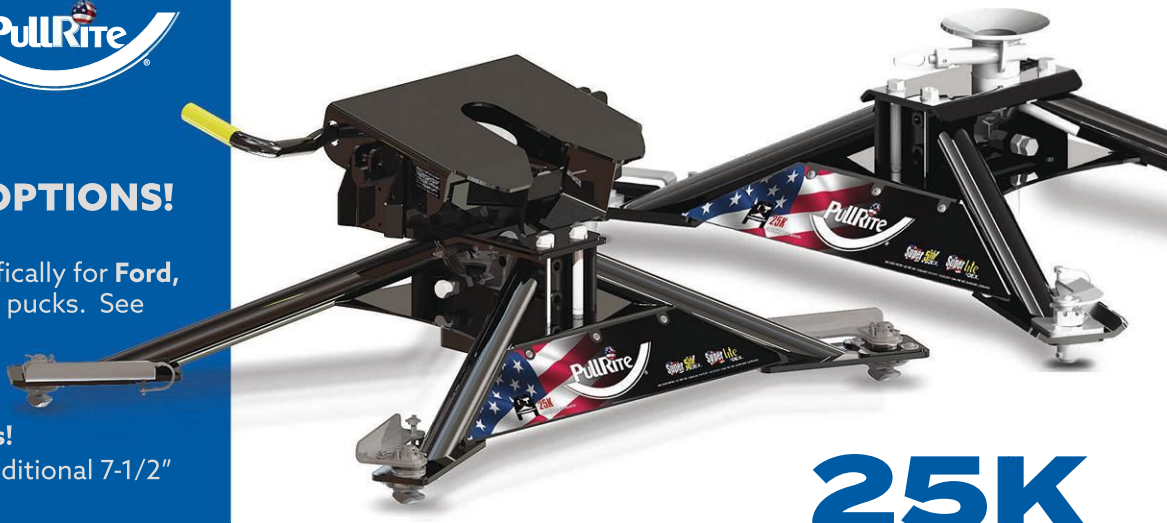
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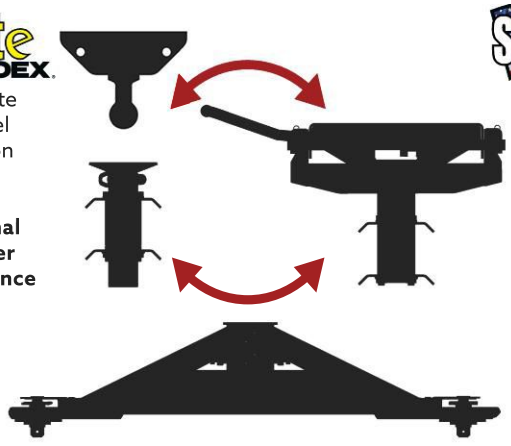
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Super 5th OEX

OEX Super 5th Hitch Plate Configuration

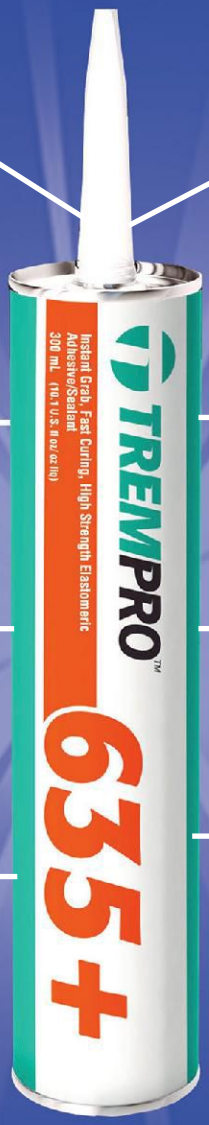
4" additional cab-to-trailer turning clearance



PART#	DESCRIPTION	LIFTING WEIGHT
#4700	#4700 25K OEX SUPER 5TH FOR 2010-2023 FORD	101 lbs. (head rmvd.)
#4715	#4715 25K OEX SUPERLITE FOR 2010-2023 FORD	85 lbs.
#4800	#4800 25K OEX SUPER 5TH FOR 2013-2023 RAM	116 lbs. (head rmvd.)
#4815	#4815 25K OEX SUPERLITE FOR 2013-2023 RAM	100 lbs.
#4900	#4900 25K OEX SUPER 5TH FOR 2020-2024 GM	94 lbs. (head rmvd.)
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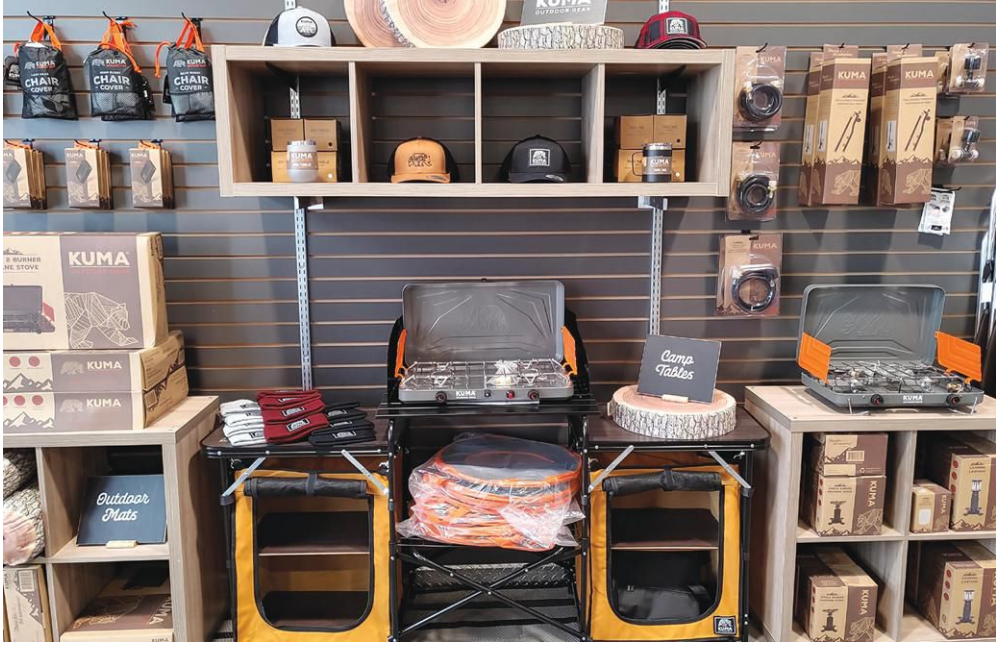
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the dealership can conveniently find and purchase the essential equipment they need for their camping trips all in one place. This convenience can enhance the overall customer experience and satisfaction. And trust us, there is no better way to test how comfortable a camping chair is than to sit in one (or three!) yourself, so make it easy for potential customers to try out the gear.

2. Tailored product selection. The parts and accessories department of an RV dealership can curate a selection of camping gear specifically for their customer. This means that the camping gear they choose to carry can target the type of RV customer they have, ensuring that the customer can easily find the gear that is suitable for their needs, improving their overall experience.
3. Expert advice and assistance. RV dealerships often have knowledgeable staff who can provide expert advice and assistance to their customers. Lean into this expertise; by offering camping gear in the parts department, new RV owners can consult with these experts to make informed decisions about what gear they need to meet their specific needs. By having staff that can offer insight on product features, new camping technology and maintenance tips, you can ensure that your customers are making the right choices and are feeling supported throughout their entire camping journey.
4. Expand product offerings. RV dealerships can increase profits by expanding their range of camping gear. By stocking a wide range of camping equipment such as sleeping bags, camp stoves, outdoor furniture, RV mats and accessories, they can cater to a wider range of preferences. This will attract more customers and increase the likelihood of making additional sales. It is also important to cover a wide price range, allowing for impulse purchases of smaller items like pillows, blankets, games, drinkware and pet accessories.
5. Less is more. Rather than cluttering the area, focus on setting up several cozy seating sections in front of the RV units, allowing customers to envision themselves living in that setting. Showcase multiple category offerings, including drinkware, lanterns, magazines and other camping essentials, placed on side tables for easy browsing. Enhance the ambiance with mats on the floor, chairs centered around fire bowls, and portable BBQs complete with BBQ tools, plates and cutlery. Adding outdoor, natural elements like fake trees and plants, rocks and chopped wood helps complete the look. This thoughtfully designed



space that creates envy will attract customers and will also entice them to spend more time there, ultimately leading to an increase in sales.

6. Focus on off-season sales. An RV dealership can expand beyond the traditional camping season with the right camping equipment available in store year-round. By diversifying product offerings to include items that are suitable for holidays like Christmas, birthdays, Mother's Day and Father's Day, they can ensure their customers are visiting throughout the year, not just during camping season. Becoming a go-to destination for holiday shopping not only drives additional sales during the off-season, but also solidifies the dealership's reputation as a one-stop-shop for all things RV and outdoor related. Remember to include a variety of price points so outdoor enthusiasts in your area can find something for anyone that loves the outdoors.
7. Cross-promote camping gear with RV sales. Leveraging existing customer bases by cross-promoting camping gear with RV sales can help increase sales. When customers purchase an RV, the dealership can highlight a wide selection of camping gear available in the parts department. By emphasizing the convenience of getting all their camping gear in one place, you can ensure that the dealership is top of mind when the customer is looking to purchase more gear. RV dealerships can also offer package deals or discounts for purchasing camping gear alongside their RV to incentivize customers to make additional purchases, boosting sales and overall profit.
8. Marketing and promotions. RV dealerships can advertise their camping gear offerings and highlight new, exciting products they have in store through various channels including websites, social media platforms, email newsletters, in-store displays and customer appreciation events. By promoting their camping gear, dealerships can increase foot traffic, have something else to talk to their customers about online and in person, and increase the chance of impulse buys when their customers bring their RVs in for service.



Amidst a record-breaking surge in RV sales, focusing on an enhanced parts and accessories department shopping experience is vital to sustain momentum. Creating an immersive and enjoyable environment can captivate customers and drive increased sales, fostering lasting loyalty.

In the ever-expanding world of RV dealerships, standing out and attracting new customers requires a strategic and original approach. By expanding the selection of camping gear available, dealerships can not only simplify the shopping experience for their customers but also cater to those who may not be ready to invest in a new RV yet.

Establishing themselves as the go-to destination for outdoor enthusiasts in the area, dealerships can position themselves as the ultimate shopping spot, catering to a wider, more diverse audience and broadening the customer base. Being able to offer expert guidance in choosing the right outdoor equipment will further enhance the dealership's appeal. RVP

Erik Dier is a sales manager for Kuma Outdoor Gear. For more information, visit kumaoutdoorgear.com.

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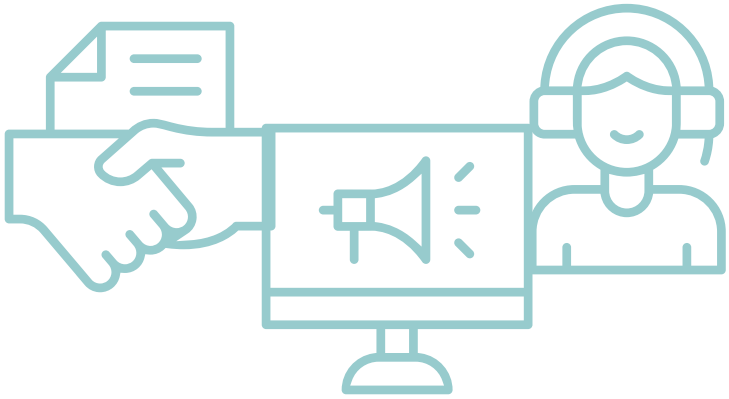
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Medallion Bank, Salt Lake City, Utah, offers its Non-prime Recreation Lending. Medallion Bank helps thousands of clients secure financing for customers with challenging credit to buy the RV of their dreams every year. It also helps clients easily manage the non-prime financing process with high-tech tools balanced with exceptional, personal service.

medallionbank.com

MBA INSURANCE

RENTAL INSURANCE

MBA Insurance, Phoenix, Arizona, presents its Rental Insurance. Specializing in vehicle rental insurance, MBA Insurance has used its distinguished products to become one of the nation's leading providers of rental insurance. MBA Insurance is dedicated to providing the best rental insurance solutions and services to meet the needs of rental businesses consisting of individual owners to large rental fleets to P2P vehicle rental platforms.

mbainsurance.net



DEALER MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

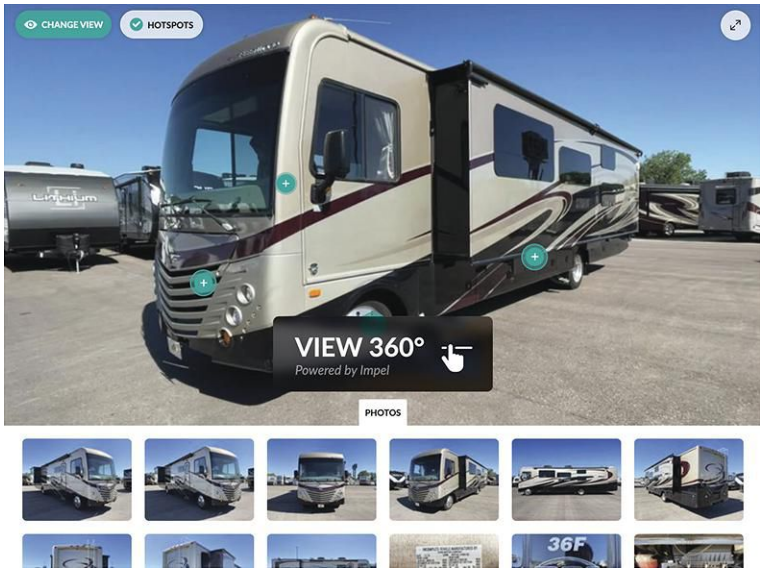
Motility Software Solutions, Maitland, Florida, presents its MotilityAnywhere. For more than three decades, Motility has remained committed to providing best-in-class dealer management software to over 7,000 users and 800 rooftops. Motility's comprehensive software delivers an end-to-end solution to specialty dealers across the country. Increase the efficiency of every critical function in a dealership, including inventory management, CRM, quoting, accounting, payroll and service scheduling, and more. MotilityAnywhere helps you do more with less so you and your team can focus on what really matters: running a great business.

motilitysoftware.com

ECO-FRIENDLY CERTIFICATION

TRA Certification, Elkhart, Indiana, presents its Certified Green by TRA. TRA works with RV manufacturers to earn Green Certification and with component suppliers to earn Eco-Verification. Qualified companies can share this designation with customers to display their environmental efforts.

certifiedgreenrvs.com



AI DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT PLATFORMS

Impel, Syracuse, New York, presents its Merchandising, Sales AI and Service AI. Impel is the RV industry's most advanced digital engagement platform. The company's end-to-end omnichannel solution leverages proprietary consumer behavioral data and generative conversational AI technology to deliver hyper-personalized experiences that optimize customer lifetime value and revenue. from online browsing, to lead management, to the RV ownership and service experience.

impel.io

REINSURANCE & F&I

Portfolio, Lake Forest, California, offers its F&I and Reinsurance for RV dealers. Portfolio delivers award-winning F&I and reinsurance products and programs to America's RV dealers. Founded in 1989 on the principle of 100% dealer ownership, Portfolio leads the industry in reinsurance expertise, performance and reporting, backed by a full suite of products – including exclusive Warranty Forever RV territories – and the best available training, support and claims management.

portfolioreinsurance.com

DEALERSHIP BROKERAGE & BUY-SELL ADVISOR

Performance Brokerage Services, Irvine, California, presents its Dealership Broker & Buy-Sell Advisor. Offering a confidential consultation and complimentary opinion of value on your business, to help you determine if now is the right time to sell. As the highest volume dealership brokerage firm in North America, the company benefits from 30 years of experience, 900 dealerships sold and a 90% closing rate. Its reputation is unmatched and governed by the utmost honesty and integrity. As proud supporters of the RV Dealers Association (RVDA), it is trusted by the most recognized dealers in the industry.

performancebrokerageservices.com

RETAIL F&I SOLUTIONS

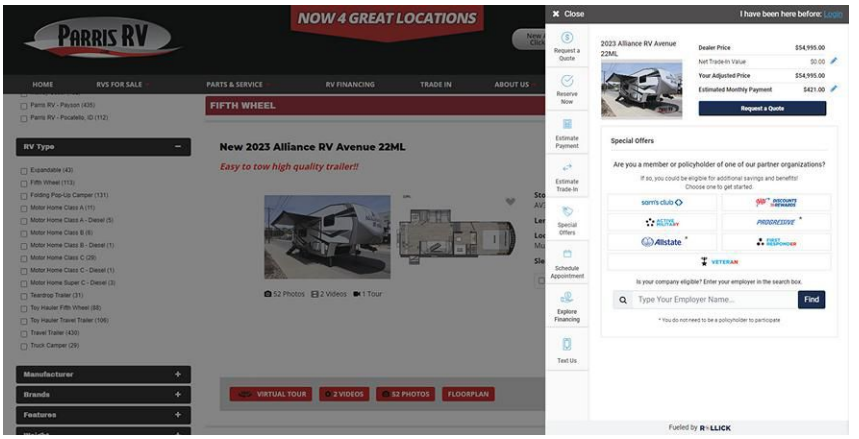
Priority One Financial Services, Saint Petersburg, Florida, presents its Retail F&I Solutions. Flexible, business-forward finance and insurance solutions for RV and trailer dealers. Priority makes it easy to offer financing and insurance to your customers without making operational changes to your business. It has established relationships with lenders, a 100% U.S.-based team, a simple and secure application and a full suite of tools designed with dealers in mind.

p1fs.com

RV ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

Relentless Dealer Services, Indianapolis, Indiana, offers its Adventure RV Roadside Assistance, available in two different coverage levels. The basic coverage is one-year coverage designed for dealerships to give to every customer who purchases. Combined with Adventure RV Club membership, it is a powerful "Why buy here" tool. The elite coverage is robust roadside coverage available for three-, five- and seven-year terms. It includes a host of benefits including emergency pet boarding and transportation, medical benefits, key replacement and food spoilage.

relentlessdealerservices.com

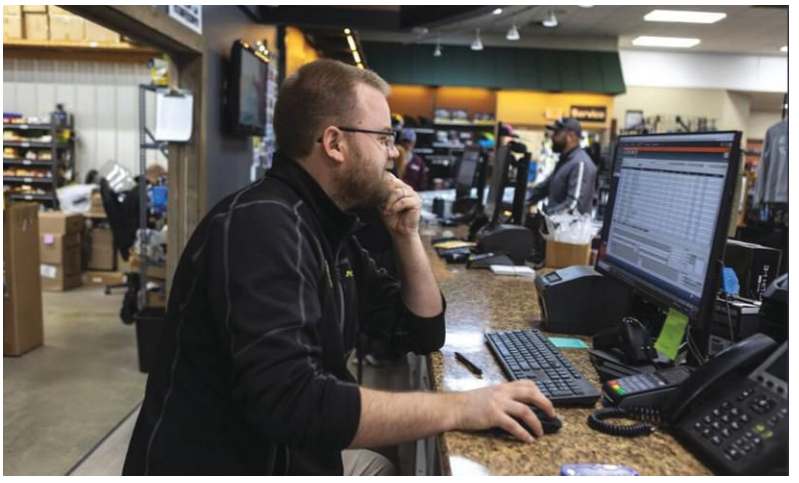


DIGITAL RETAILING SOLUTION

Rollick, Austin, Texas, presents its RollickDR. RollickDR is the recreation industry's leading digital retailing solution, which helps dealers consolidate all their lead generation activities in one simple solution. Simply add any of the following RollickDR calls-to-action to all inventory listings on your dealership website and let consumers drive their online buying experience:

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- Reserve and deposit
- Estimate monthly payments
- Pre-qualification
- Estimate trade
- Consumer offers
- Appointment scheduling
- Texting by Kenect

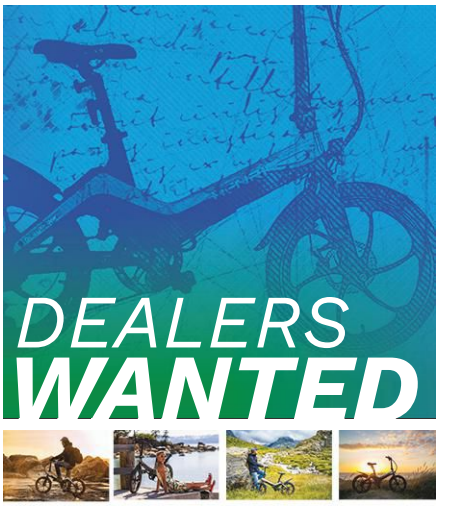
rollick.io



DEALER MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

Lightspeed, Salt Lake City, Utah, offers its Lightspeed Dealer Management Solutions. For nearly 40 years, Lightspeed has collaborated with dealerships to create industry-specific software solutions to streamline the way you work. The company is a fanatic about the recreation industry and out to make dealerships more efficient, productive and profitable. Its fully integrated platform offers a complete view of all dealership operations and provides all the reporting tools needed to grow your business.

lightspeeddms.com





The Top 11 Most Important RV Sales Skills

From building trust to accepting feedback and coaching, use these steps to ensure success as a salesperson.



Thomas Morin is an author and owner of Unlock Your Career Coaching, a North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, company that coaches salespeople in all industries on how to build the rapport and trust that customers must feel to be comfortable buying.

There are many skills RV salespeople must master to be in the top 20% and start living more off their referral business than the new customers coming in the front door.

It's typical that it takes many new salespeople two and sometimes three years to hit their stride, thus the initial challenge is to financially get through those early struggles, while learning and developing the key skills they must have to really be good at what they do.

Since many dealerships in the country are small, with only four to six salespeople, it's often that sales managers are just too busy to spend the time it takes to give a new salesperson

> "CUSTOMERS ARE MORE INFORMED EVERY DAY AND SPEND MORE TIME RESEARCHING PRODUCTS...THAN EVER BEFORE."

a fighting chance to make it to year two or three, so turnover is high. Dealerships struggle with this because they either don't have a quality person to do the training and/or aren't willing to designate the financial resources to implement a training program for new hires.

So what's left? It's helpful for new salespeople to truly understand the skills they will need to acquire to be in the top 20%, so they can take their own steps to seek out resources to help work toward that goal. With that in mind, here is a countdown of critical skills, from No. 11 to the No. 1 (in order of importance) they need to position themselves for a successful career.

11. Have Confidence & Self-Esteem

Typically, around 70% (or even 80%) of the time, a customer will say no to your efforts to ask them to buy today. Since there is much more rejection than success, this simply wears new salespeople down over time and they become disenchanted and leave the business. Unfortunately, this is a major reason for a high turnover rate with new salespeople, who never get the chance to reap the rewards that often happen in year three.

10. Be Highly Self-Motivated

Sales is a commission business, so salespeople are somewhat of an independent operator in a team environment. With that can come a great deal of competition among the sales staff, since they are all fighting for the same customer. Having an "Up" system helps give everyone more of a fair chance, but if they don't, the fastest and most motivated person often wins, since everyone is fighting for the same customer.

9. Be Able to Manage an Inconsistent Income

This is a silent killer that too many dealerships miss when interviewing new prospects for salesperson positions – the ability to handle and manage the ebb and flow of an inconsistent income. When becoming a salesperson, it's often the first time a new salesperson has had to manage a performance-based paycheck and one that truly rises and falls each month based on sales success. Everyone has bills to pay at home and salespeople need to game out possible outcomes for each month of the year, where the rise and fall of business is often affected by outside things such as the climate. Other things such as advertising programs, RV shows and product availability have a direct impact on this as well.

8. Be Open to Feedback & Coaching

Since customer needs are constantly affected by the economy, interest rates, job stability and other things, customer needs are always adapting. This typically brings adjustments in approaches and feedback from sales managers as far as selling techniques. Some salespeople simply aren't open to coaching – and in some cases criticism – when they don't adapt to those changes.

7. Work on High-Payoff Activities in Downtime

With many sales managers not having the time to provide ongoing training to their staff, it requires that salespeople take responsibility for their own development when slow periods occur. All too often, we walk into a dealership and see salespeople hanging around in groups talking about the ballgame last night instead of spending time on activities and self-development that can directly impact their ability to sell. You will never see this with top salespeople, as they will take every available minute to study, learn and increase their knowledge.

6. Be Friendly but Assertive With Customers

This is a balance some salespeople struggle to find. Of course they need to be friendly, so their customers feel comfortable, but they also need to know when the situation calls for them to be a little tougher with the customer who is just there to try to bully them (some even take pride in doing so). Although you may have heard the term "the customer is always right," frankly the customer isn't always right, and salespeople sometimes have to be uncomfortable for a couple minutes to professionally set a customer straight with the facts. The best way to describe this is what my general manager used to call me way back when I was selling: "A dove with steel talons." Salespeople need to game out these scenarios before they happen and think about how they might handle them, so they are prepared.

5. Ask Questions & Listen

Most customers walk in with either a need or a problem to solve. The only way to find out exactly what that might be is to be a questioning machine and an active listener. This is not meant to be an interrogation, but a sequential process, where each next question is founded in what the customer last said. When this happens, salespeople can help make the customer feel more comfortable talking, while at the same time revealing information the salesperson needs to move to the next step.

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4. Know Your Product

Customers are more informed every day and spend more time researching products and features on the internet before they walk in than ever before. As a result, they are more prepared with technical and product questions than in the past. Salespeople must master the product they sell to be perceived as a product expert or risk losing credibility with the customer. Once that happens, the possibility of a sale quickly drops. Even if your sales skills need polishing, being an expert on your product can help overcome this with most customers.

3. Have Honesty & Integrity

As customers, we have likely all dealt with a salesperson at some point who was less than honest. Do you remember how you felt? Customers are experts at smelling out a dishonest salesperson and they can do so in seconds. Once that happens, you're done. It's simple: You must be honest and have integrity or you won't sell anything.

2. Have Superior Follow-Through

Having or not having great follow-through is both the quickest way to build – and lose – credibility with a customer. The definition of great follow-through is simple: doing what you said you were going to do when you said you were going to do it. If it can be answered

> "IT'S SIMPLE – YOU MUST BE HONEST AND HAVE INTEGRITY OR YOU WON'T SELL ANYTHING."

now, then do that. If it can be solved now, then do it now. If you put it on a list to be answered later, commit to a day when you will get back with an answer. If I tell a

customer that I would get back to them with an answer by Tuesday at 3, then I would call them Tuesday by 3, even if I didn't have the answer yet. Each time you do this, you're credibility goes up. However, the one time you don't do it might be the last time, because all credibility will be lost.

1. Build Rapport & Trust

People buy from people they like and trust. Period. If you do everything on this list from No. 2 to No. 11 but don't build rapport and trust with your customer, you will not sell anything to them. Buying is an emotional decision – it's a feeling.

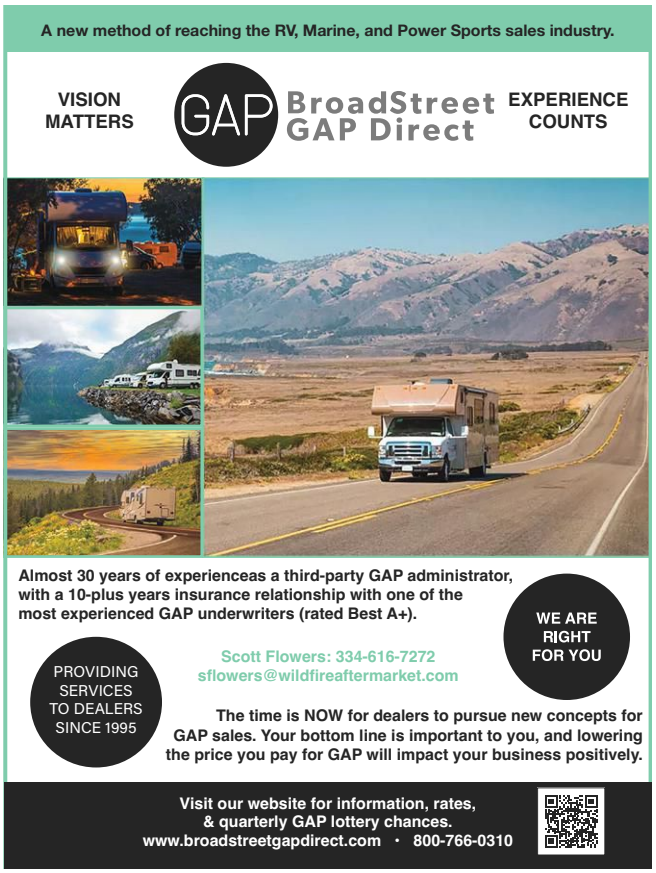
I feel so strongly about this subject, I wrote my latest book is about it ("No Trust, No Sale"). Everything you do begins and ends with the customer and how they feel about you. They know it and you know it. If you master anything on this list, master this one step first, then work on everything else, preferably in the order in which I have written it.

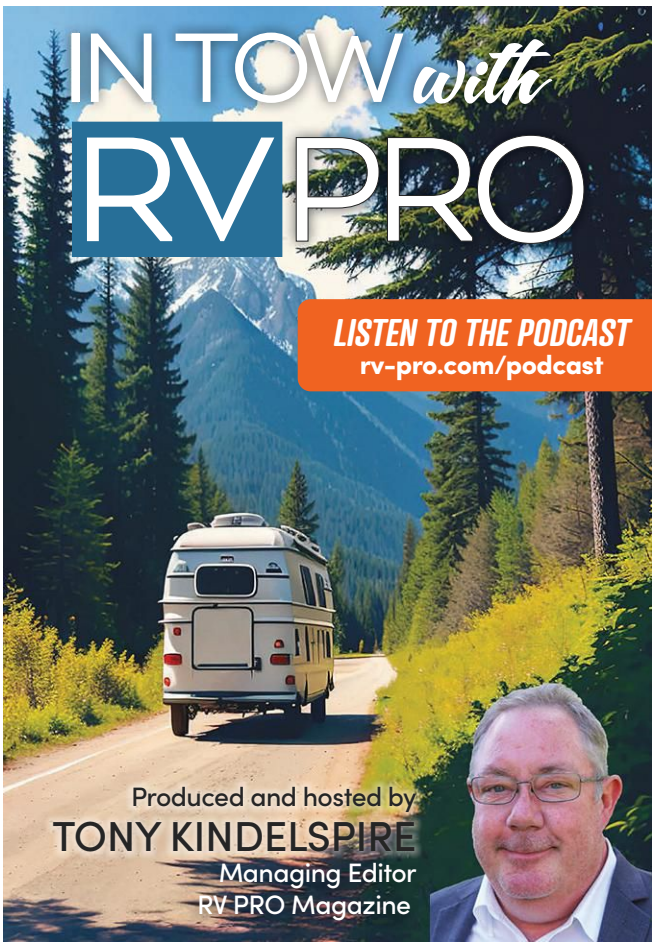
Being able to identify and understand the type of customer who is standing in front of you, how they conduct themselves, how they want to be sold, and then making adjustments in how you sell to them, will be the best investment you can make to get to year two and three (if not sooner) when you can start enjoying large and consistent commissions. RVP

10 Ways to Have a Better Conversation *With Anyone:*

1. *Don't multitask - more than set devices aside, be present (not thinking about tonight's dinner).*
2. *Don't pontificate - enter each conversation assuming you can learn something new.*
3. *Use open-ended questions - have them describe what they're feeling for a more interesting response.*
4. *Go with the flow - let thoughts come and go. Don't hold on to your "good question" and stop listening.*
5. *If you don't know, say that – err on the side of caution and speak like you're on record.*
6. *Don't equate your experience with theirs - no experience is the same, they're all individual. Plus, it's not about you.*
7. *Try not to repeat yourself - when you want to make a point, repeating yourself can make for boring conversation.*
8. *Stay out of the weeds - people don't care about the small stuff (names, dates, etc.), they care about you and what you have in common.*
9. *Listen - when you know how to listen, everybody becomes a teacher and "If your mouth is open, you're not learning."*
10. *Be brief - "A good conversation is like a miniskirt; short enough to retain interest, long enough to cover the subject." - via the source's sister*

SOURCE: CELESTE HEADLEE VIA TED TALKS





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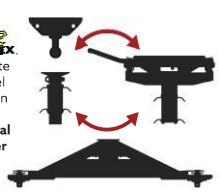
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Pit Stop



An RVer's Guide to Fall Camping



During fall, RVers can enjoy milder temperatures, drying humidity, less crowded campgrounds, peak fall foliage and fewer pesky bugs. Important things to consider when fall camping:

1. **Early closures** – some national and state parks in colder climates may close early in fall due to weather, along with Forest Service roads in national forests and access roads across BLM lands.

2. **Watch the weather** – while usually milder in the fall, there can be big differences between daytime and nighttime temps. Be prepared for rain, snow and heat.

3. **Winterize** – have necessary tools to make sure RV pipes and tanks don't freeze, check RV seams and seals, inspect the water heater and furnace for damage, have enough propane and double-check the generator works.

4. **Pack necessities** – it's important to have layered clothing, extra sleeping bags or blankets in the RV and extra drinking water. Heat a water bottle at night to sleep with. Sunlight falls quicker, so pack extra light sources like headlamps or portable lanterns.





SOURCE: THOR INDUSTRIES

20,520 TOTAL RV SHIPMENTS

30.5% DECREASE COMPARED TO JULY 2022 (29,528 UNITS)

TO DATE, RV SHIPMENTS ARE DOWN **47.7%** WITH 185,350 UNITS

JULY SHIPMENTS

"With cooler weather and lots of outdoor family fun still to be had, 38 million Americans are planning to go RVing this fall," said RV Industry Association President and CEO Craig Kirby. "And the desire to purchase an RV remains strong with our latest survey data showing 26% of travelers want to buy an RV in the next year. We expect to see this interest in purchasing an RV turn into increased RV sales."

The RV Industry Association's 2022 **SURVEY OF LENDERS' EXPERIENCES,** a nationwide survey of financial institutions on their RV lending portfolios, revealed:

- The dollar volume of wholesale loans was **$21 billion** in 2022.
- More than **200,000** retail indirect loans to consumers by reporting institutions, totaling more than $9 billion in dollars funded.
- The average down payment on retail indirect loans for RV purchases was under **18%**.
- The average amount financed was **$60,102** for new RVs and $60,305 for used RV purchases.

THE OUTDOOR RECREATION ROUNDTABLE (ORR) announced recipients of grant funding to help rural communities grow their local economies and be more resilient through outdoor recreation. The second cohort since the grant's launch in 2021 includes:

- **Marshfield, Vermont** (pop. 1,492) – to restore a 1.1-mile section of the Cross Vermont Trail that was destroyed by catastrophic flooding in July 2023.
- **Butte, Montana** (pop. 34,768) – to create a centralized website that provides information on the area's recreation opportunities to residents and out-of-town visitors.
- **Hartwell, Georgia** (pop. 4,503) – to create a plaque and marker that designates the start of a trail connecting downtown and Lake Hartwell, a popular spot for boating and fishing.
- **Yreka, California** (pop. 7,826) – to position the Jefferson Mountain Bike Company as a central hub for the community and develop a marketing campaign/online bookings for travelers between San Francisco and Portland.

In 2023, grant sizes increased to $10,000 and will provide technical assistance to awardees from ORR members. *Grants are made possible through the Richard King Mellon Foundation.*

SOURCE: RVIA

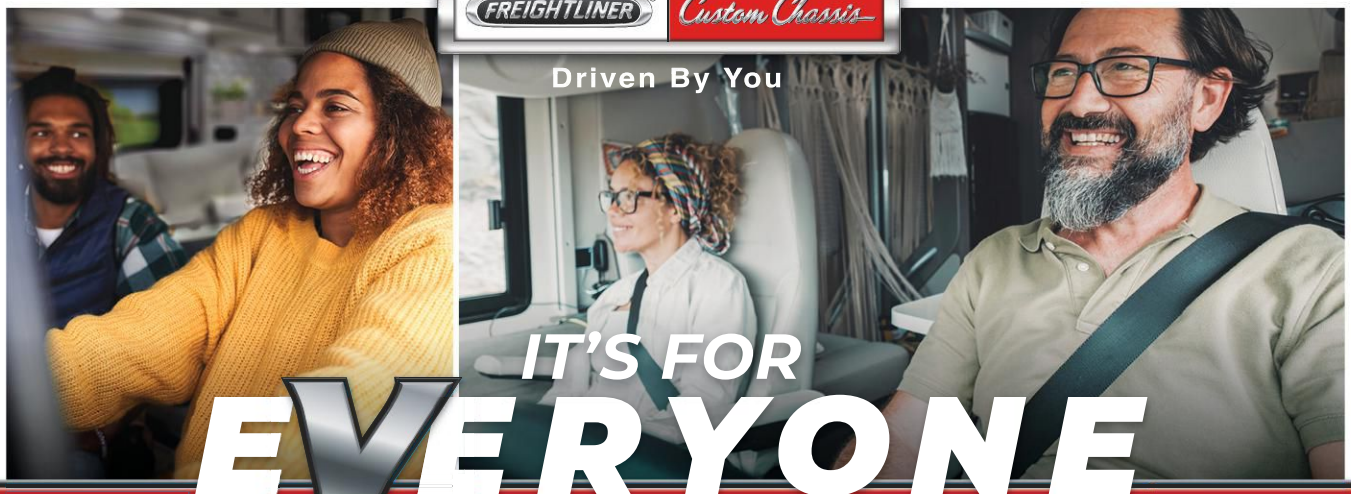
8 Bucket List Fall Foliage Views

- **Green Lakes State Park - New York**
- **Prospect Mountain - New York/Vermont border**
- **Mount Philo State Park - Vermont**
- **White Mountain National Forest - New Hampshire/Maine**
- **Cadillac Mountain - Maine**
- **Acadia National Park - Mount Desert Island, Maine**
- **Fundy National Park - New Brunswick, Canada**
- **Cabot Trail - Nova Scotia**

SOURCE: THOR INDUSTRIES

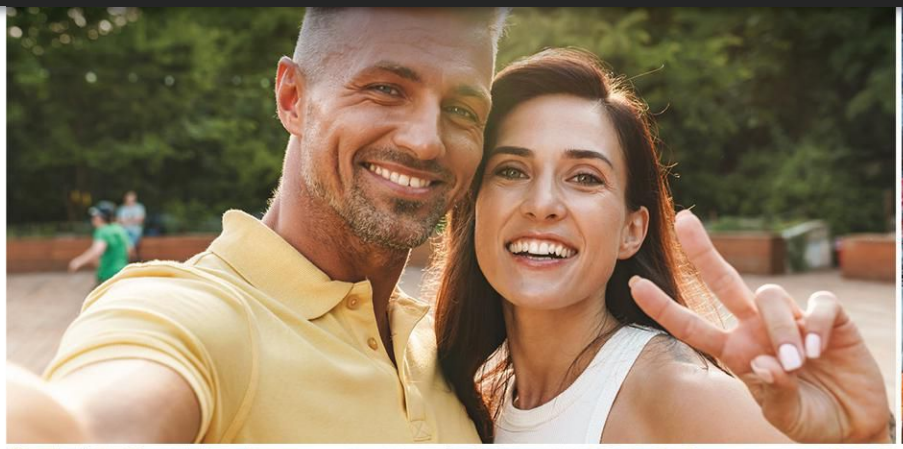
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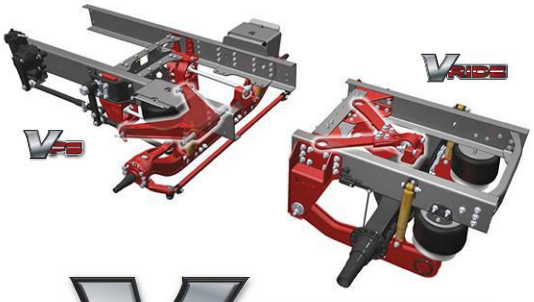


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