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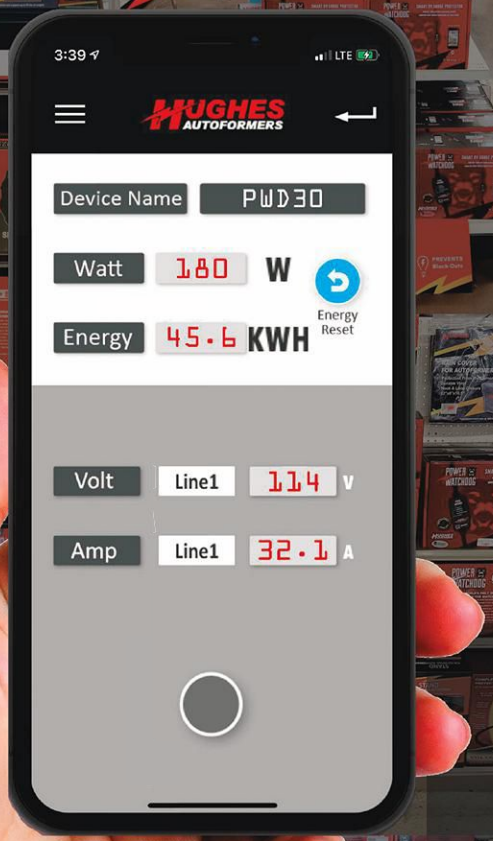
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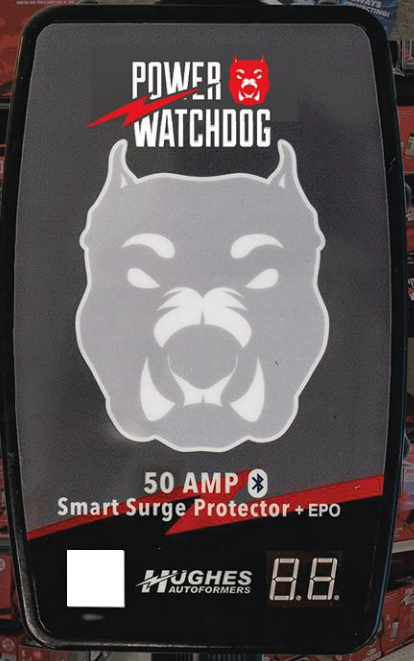
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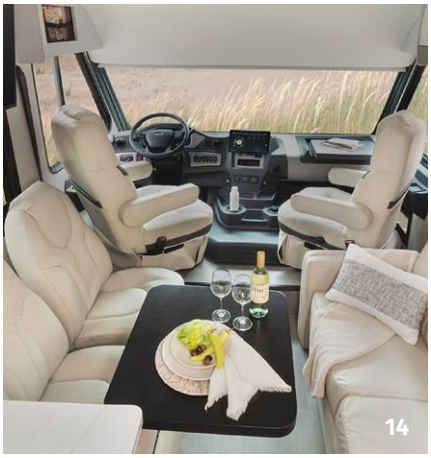
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Bell Camper Sales in Oklahoma invests heavily in great customer service to provide top-notch RV care. *Photo by Mike Harbour*

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RV PRO



Sometimes I think the word "automation" gets a bad rap, and it's understandable. When many people hear automation, they worry the human element is being taken out of the equation. In some cases that may be true, but in others, it means the human is being reassigned to another task or has time to focus on other things.

For example, in my publishing world, my colleagues have worked hard to automate processes like collecting ads or pieces of content through forms that feed into databases (to put it simply). This cuts down on a lot of back-and-forth via email and allows editors, like me, to spend time actually editing, or for art directors to take more time to design creative layouts.

In your world, automation may look like allowing a dealer management system to handle status updates, running reports or parts matching and ordering. This would allow your employees more time to focus on customer service or fixing a coach – hopefully cutting down repair event cycle time (RECT).

Automation isn't something to be feared, but something to fold into your business practices to increase efficiency.

According to an article in the Harvard Business Review, "Automation reduces the repetitive and monotonous tasks humans have to do by relegating those tasks to software, which usually means a better experience for customers, reduced error rates, improved compliance and lower stress for teams."

That same article says this of employees recently surveyed:

- 90% of workers said automation solutions increased their productivity
- 85% said the tools boosted collaboration across teams
- 90% said they trusted automation solutions to get more done without errors and help them make decisions faster

Read more on pg. 30 from Integrated Dealer Systems about how automation tools may help you navigate 2024.

Also, on p. 26 we have information from ReserveMax on how its new tools can take some of the headache out of the F&I process for your employees.

What are some of the ways your business has adopted automation or other technologies to help your business run smoother? Let us know by dropping us a note at jdking@cahabamedia.com.

Lastly on this subject, I'll leave you with this quote about automation by Bill Gates, which I'm sure will give us all food for thought:

"The first rule of any technology used in a business is that automation applied to an efficient operation will magnify the efficiency. The second is that automation applied to an inefficient operation will magnify the inefficiency."



Before I sign off, I'd like to introduce you to RV PRO's newest managing editor, Michele Moore. Moore joined the team in January and comes to us with magazine and other publishing experience, including Hoffman Media and Time Inc. in Birmingham, Alabama. With bachelor's and master's degrees in English, she's jumped right in with her red pen, correcting style and grammar mistakes and learning the ropes of the RV industry. She lives just south of Birmingham in Calera with her husband, three cats and a dog, and we hope you'll extend a warm welcome to her when you meet her at events this year.

As always, thanks for reading!

Jennifer King

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# SURF & Turf

NTP-STAG's annual EXPO brings two industries under one roof. RV PRO talks with leadership about its successful "test" and what the distributor is focusing on this year.

**STORY & PHOTOS BY JORDAN BENSCHOP**




**(From left) Olivia Irvine, 14-year-old business owner of Roasty Toasty Campfire, with best friend/assistant Emma Mcgregor.**

Whether you crave the surf, the turf or the tantalizing opportunity of both, there was something for everyone's plate at this year's NTP-STAG EXPO.

Marking a first-time collaboration with SeaWide Marine Distribution, the annual showcase brought the RV and marine aftermarkets to the Sunshine State on Jan. 15-16 with an aim to bolster connection, education and innovation between the outdoor recreation segments.

"It's amazing how many of our suppliers service both markets," said NTP-STAG President Bill Rogers in an interview with RV PRO. "Our thought process was, we have the [Florida] venue and setup happening for RV anyway, and there are a lot of crossover suppliers and crossover customers. Why not start something on the marine side?"




**Attendance at this year's NTP-STAG EXPO served both the RV and marine markets.**

On Monday, the two industries gathered at Kissimmee's Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center, where the EXPO kicked off with a talk by founder of the #nomatterwhat movement Sterling Hawkins on "hunting discomfort" in a world facing inevitable adversity. Afterward, the show's RV University portion offered attendees more than 30 supplier product and industry association presentations.

"On the marine side of the University, we maxed out the NMEA [National Marine Electronics Association] certification course. We had to get permission to expand it and only had a limited number of additional seats – we could have filled much more," Rogers said.

Mike Katz, who experienced the EXPO for the first time since joining NTP-STAG as vice president of sales last October, said the wow factor kept RV and marine attendees buzzing. University sessions armed customers with ready information to visit booths once the show floor opened.

"It definitely did its job of piquing their interest to consider bringing on new products and lines they learned about," Katz said. "Same with customers – the crossover opportunity is almost one-to-one with every RV dealer that comes in."

While talking about crossover is one thing, bringing suppliers and customers together to see opportunities firsthand can prove more fruitful, he says. And the trend in duo-dealers seems likely to continue momentum.

"I think COVID taught everybody from distribution to manufacturing that the less you have all your eggs in one basket, the better off you'll be. And when you're sitting in a market where growth trends are telling you it's going to be challenging – there's an opportunity right there. Plus, having additional customers on top of the base you already have," Katz explained.

A "bucket of prep work" and numerous changes were planned for this year's Expo, said Larry Montante, NTP-STAG's vice president of category management. Montante was recognized for 40 years of service with the company during the

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Expo's industry supplier address on Monday.

"With electronic ordering, there's been many enhancements on the customer side and supplier side – we try to make it easier for a supplier to look at what's on order for a dealer, and then they can 'suggest' orders," Montante said. "We introduced it last year, and this year, I'm hearing about more engagement with it.

"We released some of the information to suppliers a little earlier this year, so they had a chance to review and get more prepared rather than seeing it the day of."

Katz added that NTP-STAG's sales teams are using new forecasting programs to better position themselves leading up to the show.

"We're constantly improving the tools that we're putting in front of sellers before they get here," he said. The show's app makes customers more efficient by guiding them to their supplier destinations to focus on buying, rather than aimlessly perusing the show floor, Katz said.



**(From left) Larry Montante, VP of category management; Bill Rogers, president; and Mike Katz, VP of sales, during an interview with RV PRO.**

Leadership agreed attendees are becoming more comfortable using digital tools. While the show app has existed for a few years, NTP-STAG continues to enhance it for live updates, power hours, events and notifications, as well as communicating directly through the app itself.

"The more people use it, the more we're able to find out what they want, what they're searching for and how they're using the tool – we're able to provide enhancements based on those needs. We're seeing fewer physical maps, and app usage is becoming more common rather than the exception."

## SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Beyond merging two industries, the Expo's show floor brought together people of all ages – including 14-year-old business owner Olivia Irvine, who drew crowds to her shared booth with the RV Women's Alliance (RVWA) eager to see Irvine's patented designs and camping gear from her company, Roasty Toasty Campfire. According to Irvine, starting a business came after she read a financial book with her dad at 11 years old.

Rogers interacted with an attendee on the other side of the spectrum.

"I spent time with a woman here who is 100 years old. One of our customers in Vermont, she's his mother. I was really impressed," Rogers said.

Some attendees escaped just in time from states experiencing the week's "polar vortex" temperatures that spread throughout the country.

"I sat at lunch with a fellow from North Dakota who let me know the temperature change from his home to Florida was 100 degrees," Katz said.

No matter what age or location, the Expo's attendees were treated on Tuesday with a keynote address from basketball legend Bill Walton, sponsored by Carefree of Colorado. Celebrated for his success with the Portland Trail Blazers and Boston Celtics, Walton shared leadership and teamwork lessons extending far beyond the court.

Rogers said the company is moving outside of tapping solely traditional motivational speakers. It's challenging to bring in people that can relate to everybody, he said.

"We're bringing in a personality and looking at how that can resonate with people. And motivational speakers marry, for instance, with somebody that we've had for a couple years [Hawkins] that can provide the business perspective."

"After circulating among attendees and taking in the atmosphere of the overall EXPO experience, the personalization of [Walton's] presentation, including mentioning 'There are no guarantees in life, unless you are waiting for a delivery from NTP-STAG/SeaWide Distribution' was appreciated and warmly received by the audience," Rogers said in a press release.

NTP-STAG's inaugural surf and turf EXPO was a success, he said, with attendance numbers up as expected with the industry collaboration – and an event template to use moving forward. The EXPO culminated with celebrated American Idol Winner Noah Thompson, sponsored by Dometic.

Looking forward, NTP-STAG is expecting expansion in its marine segment.

"We're committed to the business, and it's a long-term commitment – slow and steady. Because of where we're coming from, we can keep growing. When you're a little more penetrated than we happen to be in the marine space, then it's a bit tougher because you have to ride the macros. But for us, it's all upside and growth," Rogers said.

In 2024 and beyond, he says the past few years' buying trends have put the RV industry's service install base in a place that's "never been greater."

"That bodes well for not only the last couple years on the service side, but I think the future as well, because some of the opportunities to replace or fix come around at different time frames. I think in terms of the products that lend themselves more to new sales or shipments – that's where more of the struggle has been. Shipments last year are probably at a low point, but it's going to be a slow and steady improvement," Rogers said. RVP

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# Aftermarket & Service To Be in Hot Demand

Distributor shows get dealers prepped for a busy season maintaining and upgrading units.

**BY JENNIFER KING**

December and January are busy months for distributor shows in the RV industry – but in case you couldn't hop on a plane to attend one yourself, here's a look at how two other recent shows fared.

## NORTHERN WHOLESALE SUPPLY RV SUPER SHOW

**Dec. 6-7, 2023**

***Treasure Island Resort & Casino, Welch, Minnesota***

With more than 92 suppliers on hand to show off new products and conduct educational seminars, the Northern Wholesale Supply RV Super Show brought in more than 450 people from 100-plus RV dealerships.

"The overall tone was cautious optimism," says Northern Wholesale Supply CEO Chad Smith. While in the recent past dealers were worried about shortages and scrambling to stock up as much as they could, Smith says the dealers mostly ordered for spring this time around, like in more "normal" years.

The training sessions were well attended – a program Northern Wholesale has been ramping up every year to great success, Smith says. In fact, next year the show will move to a different casino – Mystic Lake Casino Hotel in Prior Lake, Minnesota – so there's additional space for even more training.

Smith says he believes aftermarket sales will show healthy recovery for the next couple of years, with the record number of RVs on the roads. RV Industry Association says 11.2 million households in the United States now own an RV.

"Wholesale shipments are a good indicator of the industry, but registrations, or dealership sales, are a better measure for our demand. An even better measure is the aftermarket opportunity, and with a record number of RVs on the road, we have a bright future ahead of us. There are more RV users than ever, all using parts, breaking things and upgrading," Smith says. "So that aftermarket business should be, for the next few years, very strong. And we have to be ready to serve those customers."

Northern Wholesale Supply had a booth of its own this year, advising dealers on the top-selling service items and providing attractive displays to make sure dealers are getting that accessories and parts business.

"A lot of dealers are focusing on having service parts in stock, and making sure the showroom floor is clean and selling fast-turning accessory items," Smith says.

Also at the RV Super Show, awards were given out for the following:

- Supplier of the Year: Progress MFG
- Best Field Support: Brad Vander Pol of Demco
- Best New Production: Pullrite for the OEX Series SuperLite Hitch 25K
- Best New Product – Runner-up: Blackstone for the 28-inch Omnivore Limited Edition Bundle

For more information about this year's show in December, visit northernwholesale.com.

## MEYER RV MEGA SHOW

**Jan. 9-10, 2024**

***French Lick Springs Hotel, French Lick, Indiana***

A full day of training seminars opened the Meyer RV Mega Show in January, followed by a full day in the exhibition hall and interspersed with networking and casino fun. More than 102 exhibitors displayed their new and noteworthy products, in addition to some hosting informational sessions for a deeper dive.

Billed for RV dealers, parts and services professionals, as well as hitch upfitters, trailer dealers, plus marinas, the show boasted 30% more dealers in attendance than in years before.

"Dealers and vendors alike appreciated Meyer's commitment to the RV industry by hosting dozens of vendor seminars and vendors presenting on our show floor," says Ben Johnson, Meyer Distributing category sales manager for RV, towing and marine. "Vendors left with nothing but positive remarks on the show and outlook for 2024."

Dealers also walked away happy because of the cash and prize giveaways that were part of the Mega Show, Johnson says. This part of the show was wrapped up with the winner of the Corvette Stingray Giveaway: Carpenter's Campers of Pensacola, Florida.

For information about next year's Meyer Mega Show, visit meyerdistributing.com. RVP

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# Discover the EURO

## Meet the Coachmen Euro, where European elegance combines with North American creature comforts.

BY RONNIE WENDT

In the fast-paced world of recreational vehicles, innovation sets companies apart. RV enthusiasts look for tech-savvy motorhomes for comfortable and unforgettable trips.

The Euro, a new Class A motorhome from Coachmen, delivers on these demands. The motorhome offers a mix of European style and North American comforts, appealing to customers who want a smaller motorhome without giving up the ease of home.

The 50-amp Euro made its official debut at the 2024 Florida RV SuperShow in Tampa, Florida. But it's more than another addition to the RV market; it's a leap forward in design and innovation, according to Mike Kaiser, general manager of Coachmen Class A at Forest River.

The coach's European styling, modern interior and thoughtful features, he says, will win over a wide range of consumers, including those looking for a cozier and less intimidating driving experience.

"For consumers desiring a smaller, easier-to-handle Class A motorhome, the Euro presents a compelling alternative that doesn't sacrifice comfort or convenience," he says. "By incorporating European design elements, we created a shorter and lower Class A motorhome."

He explains, "The time was right to come out with something smaller in the Class A market."

He notes Coachmen sought to develop a shorter and narrower

PHOTOS COURTESY OF COACHMEN




Class A motorhome for years. The challenge was to do so without compromising desired amenities.

How to do that eluded the company – until now. The new Euro from Coachmen was inspired by the thriving European RV market, where Class As are designed for tighter roads and bridges less than 13 feet tall. Zach Eppers, Coachmen national sales manager, says the Euro's design required Coachmen designers and engineers to abandon the North American playbook. "We had to start from scratch," he explains.

The result of their efforts was the Euro 25EU, a motorhome that is 11 feet, 1 inch tall; 99 inches wide; and 27 feet, 9 inches long. "It's shorter and narrower than many Class Cs and similar to a lot of Class Bs," Kaiser says. "But the big thing is it still offers the creature comforts of a Class A, B and C motorhome."

## AN EXCEPTIONAL EXTERIOR

The Euro showcases a distinct front-end design, departing from the typical bus-like appearance of other Class A motorhomes and opting for a style reminiscent of SUVs or trucks.

"The flat front of other Class As can intimidate drivers," Kaiser says. "You sit so close to the road and so high that it doesn't feel like driving a car. Most people miss that dash component. The Euro's curved front cap and windshield make it less intimidating to drive and gives drivers a better feel behind the wheel."

Drivability is further enhanced with rear-view and side-view cameras that guide maneuvers in tight spaces. Both customers and dealers have expressed the enhanced driving experience sets the motorhome apart, Kaiser says.

The coach's aerodynamic design also improves fuel economy. "Being slightly smaller than other Class As, the engine does not have to work as hard and the payload is less, so it will perform better," Kaiser says.

Despite its smaller size, the Euro has a GVWR (gross vehicle weight rating) of 16,000 pounds to maintain the same amount of exterior storage and offer a greater towing capacity. It also features dual-ducted GE Profile air conditioning units with heat



pumps, larger tanks and an automatic legless awning with wind sensor. All this is possible because the coach is built on a Ford F-53 chassis with a 178-inch wheelbase and a 7.3L, V-8 gas-powered engine, notes Kaiser.

"Other Class As are built upon the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter or the Ford Transit, whereas this one is on a true 178-inch wheelbase," he explains. "That gets you 19.5-inch tires, compared to 16-inch tires; a towing capacity of 8,000 pounds; and larger 50-gallon freshwater and 31-gallon gray water and black water tanks."

The Euro also comes standard with a tire pressure monitoring system (TPMS) to continuously monitor tire pressure and provide drivers with real-time tire-pressure information. The RV's four-point automatic leveling system ensures the RV is level no matter the terrain. "You have to level the coach," Kaiser explains. "If it is not level, things will not work. It creates a problem for your slideouts, refrigerator and hot water heater. A self-leveling system makes it easy to level your RV."





## DELIVERING ON THE COACHMEN PROMISE

The Euro taps into the Coachmen advantage – a collection of features found in every Coachmen motorhome that the company says ensure a smoother ride, a better camping experience and a motorhome that will last.

This includes walls constructed of Azdel composite, which is impervious to water, won't rot or mold, and has less than a 1% chance of delaminating. The Euro features reinforced lamination on every sidewall, floor and roof to improve strength and longevity. "You don't have to worry about delamination. It has a higher R value, and it's thicker," Eppers says.

Coachmen lined the Euro's engine compartment with Dynamat, an innovative technology designed to reduce resonance and vibration. Tests have shown Dynamat can reduce engine heat by as much as 20 degrees and engine noise by up to 20 decibels, according to Coachmen.

"We insulated the engine compartment so it's a lot quieter and emits significantly less heat," Kaiser says. "This aligns with the European driving experience because when you operate this Class A, it offers a quieter ride due to its lower seating position and narrower width, resulting in enhanced stability. It's truly an enjoyable motorhome to drive."

## AN IMPACTFUL INTERIOR

Traditional motorhomes typically allocate the first 6 to 8 feet for the engine, but this RV's unique layout optimizes interior space. The Euro positions the cab over the engine, to create room for a king-size bed and a full-size bathroom.

"The look inside differs greatly from other motorized RVs or towables," Kaiser says. "We worked with designers to come up with a futuristic, modern look."

The Euro's European-style cabinetry stands out and features soft-close drawers and overhead cabinets. The modern design offers plenty of cabinets and countertop space, a backsplash and solid-surface fixtures. Completing the kitchen are an induction cooktop, a stylish vent hood, a combination oven/microwave, a 12-cubic-foot refrigerator, a dishwasher and a pantry closet.

"You're getting the quality appliances and creature comforts of higher-end Class Cs," Kaiser says. The soft-touch vinyl ceiling features upgraded lighting made of LED strips that run the width of the coach. The coach has square windows with built-in day/night shades, enhancing airflow and visibility indoors. "All these elements combine into a cleaner, fresher look," he says.

"When we started looking at our ceilings and all the ducted vents and puck lights, we decided on strip lighting that is user-friendly and has a wow factor," Eppers adds.

The lounge area was designed with passengers in mind, featuring comfortable club seating and a Lagun table that adjusts and moves easily to provide more functionality in the floorplan. "You get more seating and entertainment space up front because you can take advantage of that cockpit area, which you often can't in other platforms," Eppers says.

Currently, the Euro has just one floorplan, with a second one in the works. There is a rear bedroom slide at the back with a full-size bathroom opposite it, with a 24-inch-by-36-inch shower. "This is the only slide in the motorhome," Kaiser says. "The standout feature is the full-size bathroom. Most Class As have a split bath, where the shower is on one side and your sink and toilet are on the other. In the Euro, this is all integrated into one."

The walk-around, king-size bed also delivers on customers' needs. "You get European styling with North American creature comforts, which include a fully walkable king-size bed and a bathroom with a very large shower and plenty of room around the toilet for your legs," he says.

"We also added a 1,200-watt inverter to make a lot of the 110 outlets live," he adds. "Typically, in an RV, your outlets will not work unless you're plugged in or running a generator. This inverter lets you use your appliances, TVs and other things without plugging into electric or running a generator."

Up front, there is also an oversize radio and a computer workstation with 12-volt, 110-volt and USB outlets to keep RVers connected wherever they are. Both the radio and the computer station rotate for use from the lounge area.

The Euro's design blends the best of both worlds – European style and North American comfort. RVP

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# In a Class of Their Own

**Thor Motor Coach's Vegas and Axis** motorhomes deliver Class A amenities with a Class C feel – with a new, innovative floorplan.

BY ROB MERWIN

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THOR MOTOR COACH

Size and maneuverability are the name of the game for Class A sister product lines Vegas and Axis by Thor Motor Coach. Measuring in at between 24 and 26 feet long, both motorhome products are popular in the market because of their Class A body style with the interior space and shorter overall length of a traditional Class C.

"We're in the sweet spot. We're really focusing on a smaller vehicle for the consumers' jumping-off point to get into Class As," says RV industry veteran Jon Krider, vice president of marketing and product development for Thor Motor Coach. He adds that their size is also very popular with RVers stepping down from larger motorhomes, who like the space of a Class A cabin and cockpit without giving up the features that attracted them originally to a Class A.



Krider stresses, however, that the Vegas and Axis are not entry-level units. "It's more of a first step into the Class A lifestyle if you're not 100% sure that's what you want. They are also the perfect alternative if you don't like the look and feel of a traditional Class C with their somewhat dated dash, windshield and cab-over bunk. We're the alternative with a look that really upgrades."

Thor recently introduced a new Vegas and Axis floorplan, the 26-foot 261, at the 2024 RV SuperShow in Tampa, Florida. It's highlighted by a rear, walk-around queen bed and a front slideout room.

"It's really positioned for couples or a young family of four. At under 27 feet, it has all the features of a Class A – and that's been very popular. The Class A gives you things that a Class C doesn't have, such as greater visibility out the front with a unique windshield and cockpit area for an expansive, panoramic visibility. And our Class A's body is narrower and extremely streamlined for parking flexibility."

The Vegas and Axis feature the same floorplans but are differentiated by colors, caps and design tweaks, depending on different markets. "And we're the only company out there that can get you into a 24-foot Class A and run you up to a 42-foot Class A while serving every division in between, beginning with the Vegas and Axis."

## GETTING THAT CLASS C FEEL

Both product lines' Class C feel can be attributed to being built on the Ford E-Series chassis, though it's the stripped version as opposed to the cab version, which is unique to Thor, Krider says. "As the workhorse of the RV industry for the last 20 years, the E-Series has always had to have a cab, but with the stripped chassis, which we've been doing for the last nine years, it gives us an opportunity to implement ideas that we couldn't do with a cab, such as a more aerodynamic feel on the outside and inside, and greater storage capacity inside and out."

The stripped chassis affords Thor what nobody else has, he explains, including a "very European" posture, which is "very attractive," especially to new buyers coming into the market who are sometimes overwhelmed and intimidated by a traditional Class A. The Vegas and Axis also ride on 16-inch tires, rather than 19- or 22-inch tires, so they're not as tall and wide.

## NEW INNOVATIONS & TECHNOLOGY INTRODUCTIONS

At Thor, market research, research and development, and product design go hand-in-hand. "In order for us to be successful, we need to know what consumers are asking for and create solutions for their needs," Krider says. "It's our collective customer feedback that allows us to build new products and introduce innovations as we survey current owners, and conduct polls and market studies of new, potential customers."

Customer feedback and research now makes sure that every one of Thor's coaches has full steering wheel controls for multimedia and infotainment centers and more, from cameras and stereos to Siri and Google Search. "Steering wheel controls are one of the simple things we now do that the auto industry has been implementing for years – and 90% of our competitors don't have that," notes Krider. "People don't realize what they're not getting until they get it and how much they missed it in an RV. Class As, especially, have a significant reach from the driver and the passenger to the dash, which is probably the longest that most people have ever experienced operating a vehicle.

"We make the motorhome experience as close as possible to customers' cars – it's all about accessibility and functionality. Those are the keys that influence a lot of our different technologies and innovations."




The Axis Class A from Thor Motor Coach

Inside the Vegas Class A by Thor Motor Coach



2024 Hurricane HD-Max

Krider also says that 90% of Thor's vehicles incorporate the Winegard ConnecT system for TV antennas and connections for local Wi-Fi networks – or for a 4G antenna to pick up cellular on a customer's preferred subscription plan. "You have the ability to access emails, video conferencing and streaming video services. We make informed design decisions regarding where people can work remotely, such as the dinette, theater seat, sofa or cockpit."

Those decisions also trickle down to minute details, such as strategically planning positions and locations for USB and 110-volt ports, lighting switches, Bluetooth and more.

Thor continues to innovate in its manufacturing processes, including the introduction of more composite materials for lightweighting in the interest of fuel economy – aluminum versus steel in many cases, for example.

The manufacturer also reexamines how its components are put together and is moving away from traditional wood products – especially considering what's in the future for RVing and its challenges, such as emissions controls and new rules for Class A diesels. Krider says the industry continues to get smarter about making vehicles that are more efficient, not just drivetrain-wise, but also regarding house power and what's being used while not driving.

"Thor is very forward-facing. We look at a market, and we'll attack the market by introducing products. One of our big strengths is our interior look and feel – they really set us apart. Our all-female design staff gives us a huge advantage. Our diversity also applies to the diversity of the marketplace and the different customers we're trying to attract, and our management staff is open to making changes on the fly for what's best for the consumer."

## DIFFERENT TIMES, DIFFERENT NEEDS

Motorhomes are not just for camping anymore. As the market shifts, Thor Motor Coach examines what people are using motorhomes for generationally. Sometimes motorhomes are bought because RVers want to tailgate with their friends or just use them exclusively for travel, not necessarily camping. The traditional camping aspect is not so nearly defined anymore – it's become very broad as to what people's expectations are in what a vehicle can have and allow them to do, Krider explains.

Both the Vegas and Axis fit that mold. "We strive to make sure we appeal to the largest needs of the market. It's not one-size-fits-all. We're solely focused on motorhomes, not trailers or anything else. It's what we do.

"We want to be where the market sits – not be chasing it, but leading it." RVP

RV PRO webinar

**March 21, 2024**
**1 p.m. CT**

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**Joe Souza,** District Manager of Environmental, Health and Safety at KPA

Joe Souza has more than 26 years of experience in occupational safety and health in private and public entity settings. He is the district manager for the western United States; has earned his degree as an Occupational Health and Safety Technician; is an OSHA Outreach Trainer; has multiple certifications related to safety; and is a subject matter expert in over 40 safety related topics. Committed to providing a safe and healthy workplaces, Souza's areas of responsibility includes compliance with all state and federal regulations relating to occupational safety and health. Souza provides leadership, training, information, resources, policy development and consultation services to more than 1,600 facilities. Experience also includes development and implementation of safety and environmental programs and services for general, cannabis and construction industries.

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# Bell Camper Sales

**This family-owned business keeps people coming back with its emphasis on quality service and a standout campground.**

STORY & PHOTOS BY MIKE HARBOUR





In operation for more than half a century, northeast Oklahoma's Bell Camper Sales is the oldest RV dealership in the region, and it's still owned by a member of the Bell family. It even offers truck campers just as Blackie Bell did when he founded the business in 1967.

Yet much has changed since the store was located on a small lot near downtown Bartlesville. Now led by grandson Lane Bell, Bell Camper Sales sits on a 50-acre site in suburban Dewey, selling everything from off-road teardrop trailers to motorhomes, and employs 29 people. There's a 12-bay shop, an indoor showroom, a 3,000-square-foot parts department and a campground with more than 100 sites.

"My dad, Steve, got back involved in the business in 1986," Bell says. "He was actually a professional musician out in Reno, Nevada. We always make the joke that I came along and ruined his and Mom's good time out there, so they came back and started working at the dealership."

In the early 1990s, Steve Bell moved the dealership from its original location to a larger site in Bartlesville where it remained until 2019. During that time, Lane graduated from high school and left town to get a business management degree at Oklahoma State University. Unsure if he wanted to return to the family store, he worked at two large RV dealerships in Tennessee and Texas before the Sooner State wooed him back.

It was a good thing, too, as Bell, who became sole owner of the dealership last year, brought back some needed perspective to a dealership that previously focused mainly on sales.

"I came up in parts and service," he says. "I was a service writer and a parts manager. Being in the service department, you learn a lot about customer service. Service is the backbone. Something that surprises me still to this day is there are a lot of dealers that service is more of an afterthought. Warranty work was something you did just to help the customer out. You fixed what the problem was. Dad never actively looked for warranty work on the lot. When we get a trailer in, we do a big prep when it hits the lot to try to catch as many warranty issues as we can right off the bat."

To Bell, parts and service definitely aren't afterthoughts.

"That was a big shift we made. I think the RV industry is getting ready here to real quickly realize how important service is. Obviously, when sales are down, like we've had last year, you've got to have a solid service department that you can lean on a little bit," he says. "Our service department is going gangbusters. When people aren't buying trailers, they're fixing them. We've had a good year in service."

Bell points to his revenue as proof: between 20% and 30% of it comes from his parts and service departments, substantially higher than the dealership average of 10% or so.

"Sales is what makes the money, but service is what keeps people coming back. Sales gets you the first unit sold – service gets you the next three or four units sold," he says. "If someone comes in with a trade and if the deal doesn't get made, our service department is actively prospecting that customer. We're going through old service contacts that we haven't had a work order for in a while and asking them, 'Hey, if you've got an extended warranty, come in and we'll do a warranty check,' or 'We've got these specials going on' or 'If you ever need anything, give us a call.' That's something that has actually yielded some results."

Bell has ample staff to handle the work, too, with nine technicians, three service writers and a service manager on hand to keep units moving through the shop. He's making sure training moves to the forefront.







**(Above left) Lane Bell (right) with his parents Steve and Kim. (Above) Brien McCormick, F&I manager; Lane Bell; and Mathew Baxter, service manager. (Right) Bell's parts and service department brings in 20% to 30% of the dealership's revenue.**

"We do lots of training with our techs. We send them to the manufacturer every year to get trained. We have Lippert and other vendors come in and do training here," he says. "We've been talking about getting all the techs certified."

His parts staff – which consists of a department manager and two employees – and his service writers already completed RV Learning Center certification; his service manager will get certified once the curriculum is ready.

As for compensation, Bell runs a modified flat-rate shop. Billed hours are paid at a flat rate while nonbilled hours are paid at a base rate. He's strict about technicians billing time, too.

"Other than demos, as our techs do demos, they have very limited interface with customers. Our techs are here to bill time. Anything that pulls them off billing time, we try to keep away from," he says.

Pre-delivery inspections, like demos, are usually handled by technicians with a few years under their belts. His most seasoned veterans, naturally, get the more extensive jobs, such as slide, roof and sidewall work. Bell doesn't have a spray booth, but the shop can take small paint and body jobs. Chassis service beyond oil changes and the like get outsourced.

To Bell, what really makes the dealership stand out in the region known as Green Country is his well-appointed campground.

"We've got some spots dedicated just for deliveries. That works really well," he says. "We all but make customers stay their first night or two in the campground just because any issues they have, things they might've forgotten, all that kind of stuff, allow us to get a lot of those problems dealt with upfront before they go on a trip."

Bell's only regret with the campground, which debuted in 2017 before the dealership made its move north two years later, has been not making it big enough when it opened.

"Last July, we added 71 sites. We opened with 30, and we were at 90% to 95% occupancy and had been for a while. We should've probably added on sooner," he says. "There's a fishing pond with a dock, there's a pickleball court back there, we've got a couple of playgrounds, and there's two dog runs and two pavilions."

All sites, which measure 39 feet from

end to end, boast 15-, 30- and 50-amp service, two sewer hookups, water, plus high-speed Wi-Fi and cable TV. There's also a laundromat and a small store on-site with basic RV supplies. Bell is especially pleased with the facility's income as sales have waned.

"We have more monthly rentals than we have anything else. The average stay at our campground is eight to nine months. We have some people who have been with us for years. We opened up in March 2017, and one tenant moved in with us in June 2017. He's been here ever since," Bell says.

Taken with the concept, Bell has been scouting Green Country and beyond for other dealership-campground locations.

"I'd love to have a second location, probably in Tulsa. There's been several other places I've looked at, maybe Stillwater, maybe Enid," he says. "Stillwater and Enid would be something like this – not great big, but would service a broad area around them. If we went to Tulsa, we would focus on the Tulsa market. That is definitely in the cards."

He's considered both buying or building stand-alone campgrounds.

"I haven't quite pulled the trigger on either one yet. I'd like to. I've been talking to the Corps of Engineers about redoing one of their old campgrounds that they defunded back a long time ago, but the red tape has been unbelievably horrible," Bell says.

Beyond the campground, the dealership has tapped another revenue stream: a 10-unit rental fleet established last year with eight travel trailers and a pair of motorhomes.

"The main factor behind rentals was to offer more to customers in the area. Demand for rentals has picked up in the previous couple of years as RV use has become more prevalent and popular," Bell says. "We had been getting a lot of people asking about it."

Of the 300 units Bell sells yearly, about 15 to 20 are consignments, another good revenue source.

"A lot of times, used units are hard to buy from a customer," he says. "That's why we do a fair amount of consignments. I don't want to take that risk on by putting too much in used inventory. There's a lot of dealers out there right now getting ready to get bit hard by having too much in used inventory."




**A first-rate parts and service department is essential to Bell's business.**

Bell first negotiates a value that a consignment customer would take for a unit and then advertises a price higher than that to cover the dealership's PDI and other costs. It's better than having a lot of money in used units that may not turn quickly.

Usually, the dealership keeps 90 to 100 units on the lot and anywhere from 10 to 20 are used. The bread and butter? Midsize travel trailers – Bell offers Rockwood, KZ, Palomino's SolAire and Real-Lite models, plus Clipper teardrops, Shasta travel trailers and Phoenix fifth wheels.

With increasing interest rates, Bell is still debating whether getting back into motorhomes – he recently took on Coachmen Pursuits and Cross Trails – was a good decision.

"Higher ticket-priced units have not been moving well," he says. "The industry as a whole has shifted toward entry-level products. That is not uncharacteristic of a high-interest rate economy. When you're talking $30,000 at 8% is kind of so-so. When you're talking $120,000 at 8%, when you look at what you're going to pay in interest, it gets a lot harder to swallow. The high-end fifth wheels are in the same market. They're down right now. Anything over $60,000 has been harder to move last year without a doubt."

Besides lending rates, Bell also blames oversaturation; with so many units sold during COVID to a finite amount of customers, there was no direction to go but down.

Regardless, he's bullish on RVs and enjoys giving back to the industry. In addition to being part of Bell Camper Sales, he sits on the RV Dealers Association's board of directors, represents Oklahoma as a state delegate and sits on the convention committee.

"I've been going to RVDA since I came back. RVDA is super vital just from the learning aspect, for not only me but everybody else at the dealership, too. I always take my F&I and service managers, we might take so more people," he says. "I like going just to talk to other dealers. It's kind of like a 20 Group meeting."

Bell also believes independent stores like his will survive despite the whirlwind of corporate acquisitions in the RV industry today.

"I do think that there will always be some mom-and-pops out there," he says. "I think it's more of a level of service. There's going to be people who want to buy on price and price alone. The person shopping on price alone very well might buy from Camping World or Blue Compass, but many of the second- and third-time buyers are going to realize that there's a lot of things that they can get at a smaller store that they won't be able to get at a larger chain." RVP

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# Tackling the Challenging World of F&I

How ReserveMax hopes to make the process more palatable for everyone in the dealership.

BY JENNIFER KING

Finance & Insurance (F&I) is arguably one of the most important departments in any dealership, and any help F&I employees can get to make the deal better for the customer – and more profitable for the dealership – is typically eagerly accepted.

RV PRO chatted with Stephanie Alderman, COO and head of product for ReserveMax – an F&I solution that automates the decision-making process to ensure dealers make the most reserve on deals – to learn more about their services and why it can be helpful for a dealership's success.

**RVP: Please tell us how ReserveMax – and the parent company Canopy – came to be. What was the inspiration for these ventures?**

Alderman: ReserveMax is the brainchild of Canopy founder Lyle Peluso, who spent years working in auto and RV dealerships across both sales and F&I departments. After several years as a consistent top performer, he quit to form Canopy and launch the first product, ReserveMax. He understood the challenges faced by both sales teams, in desking deals accurately, and F&I managers due to a lack of standardization across the options in the indirect lending market.

Very early on he teamed up with co-founder and Chief Technology Officer Jeremy Grice. Jeremy has over two decades of experience, specializing in software development and telecommunications. As the lead technologist, he brought in talent from his network and built the tool we have today. The company has a wealth of experience on our engineering team, including a senior architect with experience working at multiple Silicon Valley companies, like Lyft, LinkedIn and Amazon.

I joined forces with Lyle and Jeremy shortly after they publicly launched the product as COO and head of product. Prior to joining Canopy, I served in leadership positions across operations, managed services and product strategy for asset management firms as well as fintech firms devoted to automating operations across financial services clients.

Our first product, ReserveMax, was built with the purpose of increasing profitability at a dealership by solving the issues of complexity in the indirect lending market that affect every step in the financing process.

**RVP: Can you give us an overview of what ReserveMax can help dealers with? What pain points does it solve for dealers?**

Alderman: ReserveMax simplifies the financing process for dealers by offering easy comparison between their existing lenders, effortless prequalification, accuracy when desking a deal, and the potential to access new lenders in their market. In doing so, a dealership can provide a better user experience for customers participating in their financing business, while maximizing the profitability and speed with which deals are completed.

We're leveling up the sales managers and inexperienced F&I managers so that they can focus on customer service, insurance product knowledge, and maintaining adherence to compliance standards. We've also partnered with 700 Credit so that a customer can be prequalified with our tool, even before they



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start shopping for an RV, giving the sales team and customer a better understanding of what they can afford and what their financing preferences and options are. Using the workflows in ReserveMax, we can offer a seamless transition from sales to F&I all at the click of a button.

**RVP: What type of dealers will find ReserveMax most valuable and why?**

Alderman: Any dealership that's offering financing with indirect lenders will benefit from using ReserveMax. The large majority of our customers are using our tool to desk deals, not just as an F&I tool. By putting it in the sales managers' hands early in the process, they're able to realize its full potential.

It's being used to optimize deal structures earlier, overcome cash customer objections, choose the lender that offers the best deal for the customer based on the customer's clear preferences, and to do it in minutes instead of hours.

**RVP: How has the rollout and response from the industry been? What feedback have you received?**

Alderman: We've had significant feedback from many in the industry, across dealers, software partners and lending institutions. We are excited to have the opportunity to partner and integrate with several of those parties in the coming months and years.

We love hearing the ideas our customers have on how we can improve our tool and what types of features they hope to have in the future. Our product roadmap is formed directly from their feedback, and we've been fortunate that our early customers have so much industry experience that they're willing to share to shape our tool for the benefit of all our customers.

**RVP: What do you hope ReserveMax teaches dealers? What do you think it helps them do in relation to their competitors?**

Alderman: ReserveMax takes the difficulty of navigating the RV financing options off the table for everyone in the dealership. They'll have more time to focus on product training and customer service.

Many of our customers are using the tool at RV shows this season and are able to work up deals in minutes while their competitors are struggling in the heavy volume atmospheres. We love hearing their success stories.

**RVP: Is there anything else you'd like to add that dealers need to know about?**

Alderman: While the lending ecosphere is complex, our implementation and set up isn't. We work with customers to load their lending programs, set up their locations and users, and have them up and running on the system in a matter of weeks.

In addition to a simple and painless implementation, we are always looking for new partners and features to add value to our tool. We are committed to continuous improvement while seeking to offset costs, where possible, for our customers as we add new benefits to the platform through strategic partnerships and integrations. RVP



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# 7 Insights to Help You Navigate 2024

RV dealer industry statistics show challenges and opportunities for success.

BY INTEGRATED DEALER SYSTEMS



PHOTO: MONKEY BUSINESS - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

As we head out of the first quarter of the year and into the next one, it's important to make sure you're still on course with your goals. Are they aligned with consumer expectations? Are you taking into account trends in automation, analytics and network security in your business operations?

We surveyed our customer database of RV dealers across North America to find out how technology and personalization will fuel dealers' growth in 2024. Here are the findings.

## 1. Dealers anticipate rising product prices to be their biggest challenge this year.

2023 proved to be a difficult financial year for the RV industry. The steep hike in interest rates cooled down the market, and many dealers struggled with aging inventory sitting out on their lots. While 2024 is anticipated to be a better financial year, dealers should still brace themselves for a harder sell.

***What does this mean for dealers?***

Owners can benefit from diversifying revenue sources within their dealerships. There is an opportunity to drive more business to your service department – after all, the surge in RV sales in previous years points to a future demand for repair and maintenance services. Dealers can also differentiate their business by offering mobile service options and post-service benefits.

Let's also not forget the opportunity to turn accessories into a profit center. Consumers want more customization and enhancements to their units than ever before. Dealers should consider having someone on their team who specializes in accessory sales, and who can provide tailored recommendations.

## 2. Dealers want to automate their warranty submissions, analytics reporting and status updates.

Hiring and retaining talent was the second biggest challenge dealers surveyed expected to face this year. Many dealerships are operating with lean teams. Luckily, there are plenty of opportunities to automate time-consuming and tedious processes within the dealership. Warranty submissions were the biggest process dealers wanted to automate (57%), followed by analytics reporting (43%) and status updates (43%), then parts ordering (40%).

***What does this mean for dealers?***

Dealers should work with their dealership management software providers to see what automation functionalities they can leverage to have the biggest impact on their operations. Automating processes like status updates, running reports, scheduling service and parts matching and ordering can all significantly decrease repair event cycle times (RECT).

## 3. Dealers report that bank financing options are used the most by their customers.

Despite 2023 being a slower financial year overall, our survey reported that most customers who did buy an RV bought new (69%). Even more notably, our market data showed that the finance and insurance (F&I) department's performance remained at a high in 2023, with F&I contributing 50% of the total gross profit for each RV sale. What's more, 2023 saw a 62% growth in finance penetration, suggesting that consumers are still willing, or even keen, to finance their RV purchases.

***What does this mean for dealers?***

This interest in financing presents a clear avenue for the F&I department to increase its profits. With 75% of survey respondents reporting that customers most commonly opt for bank financing, dealers would be wise to look for opportunities to work with



lending institutions to design flexible and/or in-house financing options.

## 4. Families with young children show the most interest in buying RVs.

According to our survey, families are the most common demographic looking to buy an RV, followed by millennials/Gen Z and retirees coming in a close third. This is a trend we have seen on the rise over recent years for a few reasons: the high cost of travel makes campers an attractive vacation option for families, and the high cost of living makes mobile homes an alternative for people looking to enter the housing market.

***What does this mean for dealers?***
Dealers aren't just selling RVs – they're selling the RV lifestyle. They should look for opportunities to sell that lifestyle in marketing campaigns. Now is also the time to invest in a content marketing strategy – these audiences are content fanatics. Dealers can create content that will get them interested in the RV lifestyle and find ways to connect their brand with that lifestyle.

## 5. Dealers are concerned about cybersecurity threats against their digital infrastructure.

Over the past few years, there have been numerous reports of dealerships facing data breaches. In 2021, Black Kite published a report titled "Ransomware Risk: Automotive Manufacturing in 2021" that cited a whopping 17% of automotive suppliers surveyed were at a high risk of ransomware attacks.

Consumers are also fearful of the threat posed to their data once it's handed over to a business. That's why cybersecurity isn't just important for network stability, but also for building customer trust.

***What does this mean for dealers?***
Many RV dealerships are moving to cloud security in their bid to bolster cybersecurity. By keeping data in a remote, highly secure facility, dealers can access their data at any time while also shielding it from cyber – and environmental – threats.

## 6. The demand for eco-friendly RVs and add-ons is here to stay.

In our 2023 survey, we asked dealers if they were supplying eco-friendly add-ons and 90% said yes. In this year's survey, 53% of dealers said they hadn't noticed an increased demand for eco-friendly RVs and features, but a not insignificant 34% said they had seen a slight increase.

Several major manufacturers have announced their electric camper vans, like the Winnebago eRV2 and the Thor Vision Vehicle. Dealers can expect to see more electric options entering the market in the coming years.

***What does this mean for dealers?***
Consumers are more conscious than ever of the impact of their purchasing habits on the environment. Dealers have an opportunity to market a lower-footprint lifestyle with sustainable and off-grid vehicles and add-ons.

## 7. Customers expect faster service and more mobile service options.

According to our survey, 53% of respondents said they have noticed customers expecting faster service turnaround times. What's more, 34% of respondents have seen an increased demand for mobile service. We are seeing more and more dealers offering mobile services where technicians visit the customer's location for minor repairs and maintenance. This can alleviate some pressure from the service bays and offer a convenient solution for customers.

***What does this mean for dealers?***
Every dealership should be measuring its RECT. After all, if you don't measure it, you can't manage it. Breaking down each part of the work order allows dealerships to pinpoint areas of improvement. Then, teams can employ techniques like setting up triage teams to expedite work orders, ensuring units are serviced promptly. RVP

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Integrated Dealer Systems (IDS) provides dealer management solutiosn for the RV, marine and trailer industries. For more data and industry insights, read the IDS RV Dealer Industry Trends. Report: ids-astra.com/trends-report.

# WHAT DEALERS HAVE TO SAY

## Manufacturer Quality Survey

**BY RV PRO STAFF**

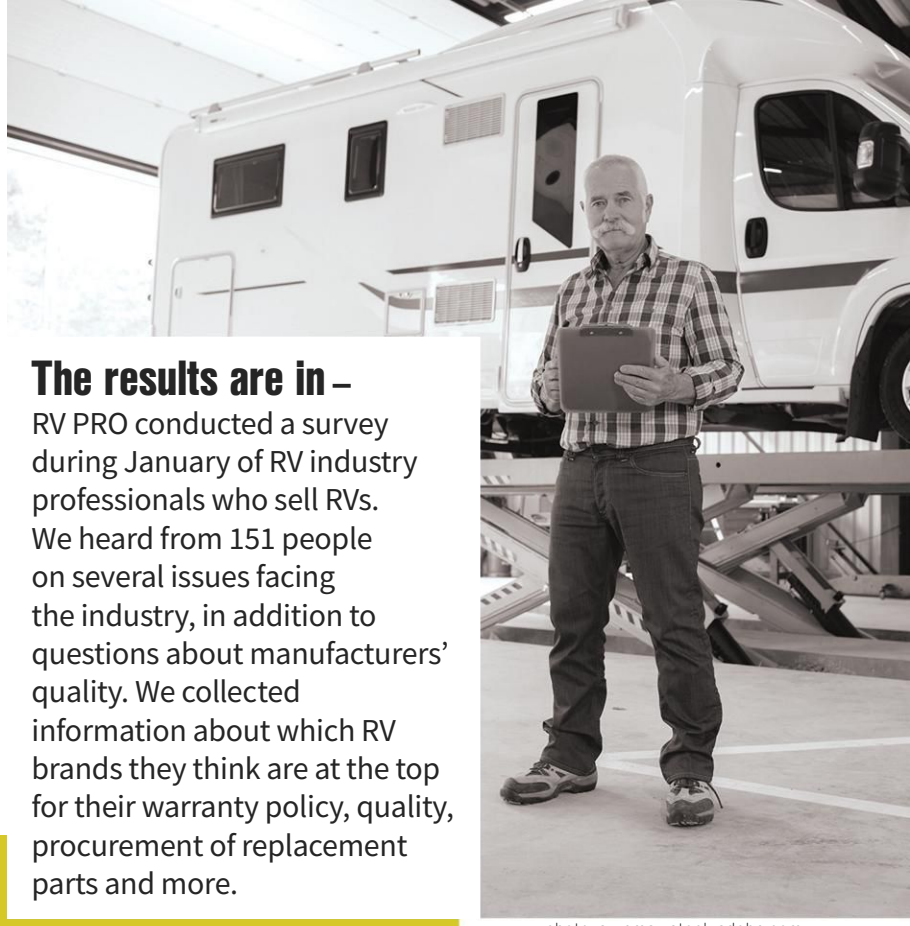


photo: auremar-stock.adobe.com

**The results are in –** RV PRO conducted a survey during January of RV industry professionals who sell RVs. We heard from 151 people on several issues facing the industry, in addition to questions about manufacturers' quality. We collected information about which RV brands they think are at the top for their warranty policy, quality, procurement of replacement parts and more.

### Which OEM has the best warranty policy?

1. Jayco
2. Forest River
3. Grand Design
4. Keystone
5. Alliance

### Which travel trailer OEM has the best quality?

1. Jayco
2. Forest River
3. Grand Design
4. Airstream
5. KZ

### Which fifth wheel OEM has the best quality?

1. Jayco
2. Grand Design
3. Forest River
4. Three-way tie: Keystone, KZ and Alliance RV

### Which Class A OEM has the best quality?

1. Jayco
2. Entegra
3. Newmar
4. Tiffin
5. Winnebago

### Which Class C OEM has the best quality?

1. Jayco
2. Forest River
3. Winnebago
4. Dynamax
5. Coachmen

### Which OEM has the best PDI?

1. Jayco
2. Forest River
3. Grand Design
4. Airstream
5. Newmar

# THOR

# THANK YOU

We're proud to be the leader in every category of the RV PRO quality survey.

The THOR family of companies is committed to elevating the RV experience for owners and partners through industry-leading quality, superior service and unparalleled innovation.

## THOR FAMILY OF COMPANIES

AIRSTREAM
CROSSROADS
CRUISERRV
DRV Luxury Suites
Dutchmen
ENTEGRA COACH
HEARTLAND RECREATIONAL VEHICLES
Highland RIDGE RV
Jayco
KEYSTONE RV COMPANY
KZ RECREATIONAL VEHICLES
STARCRAFT
THOR MOTOR COACH
TIFFIN MOTORHOMES
VENTURE




WARRANTY


PDI


REPLACEMENT PARTS


RESALE VALUE


TRAVEL TRAILER


FIFTH WHEEL


CLASS A


CLASS B


CLASS C

THORINDUSTRIES.COM



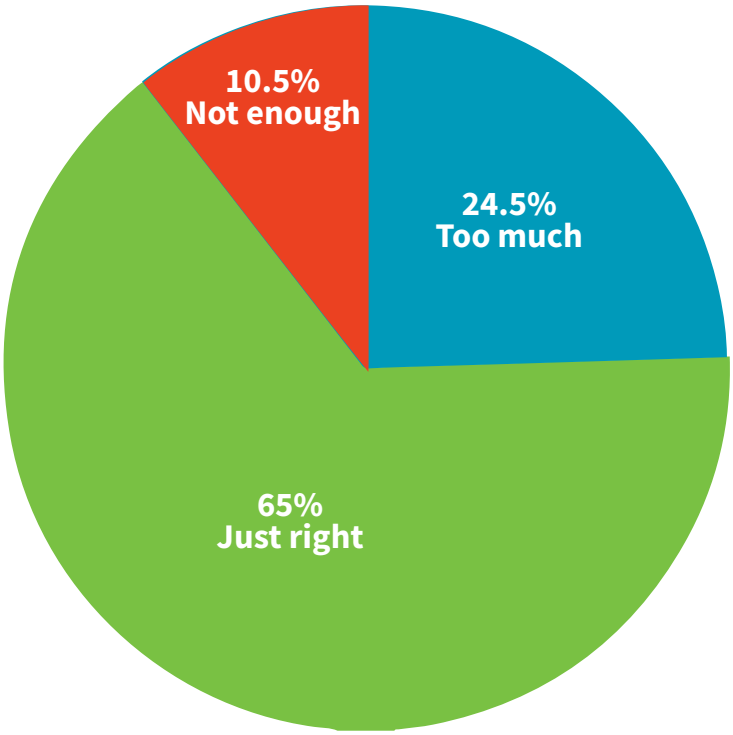
photo: karegg-stock.adobe.com

## Which Class B OEM has the best quality?

1. "Other" – write-in votes include Jayco and Entegra
2. Thor Motor Coach
3. Winnebago
4. Airstream
5. Coachmen

## Which OEM brand has the best resale value?

1. Jayco
2. Airstream
3. Grand Design
4. Forest River
5. Four-way tie: Keystone, Newmar, Tiffin, Winnebago




## Which OEM is it easiest to get replacement parts from?

1. Jayco
2. Forest River
3. Grand Design
4. Keystone
5. Winnebago

## How would you describe your current inventory levels compared to last year's levels?

| | |
|---|---|
| Too much | 24.5% |
| Just right | 65% |
| Not enough | 10.5% |

Jayco

# GET AWAY IN A JAYCO RV

GENERATIONS OF FAMILY FUN.



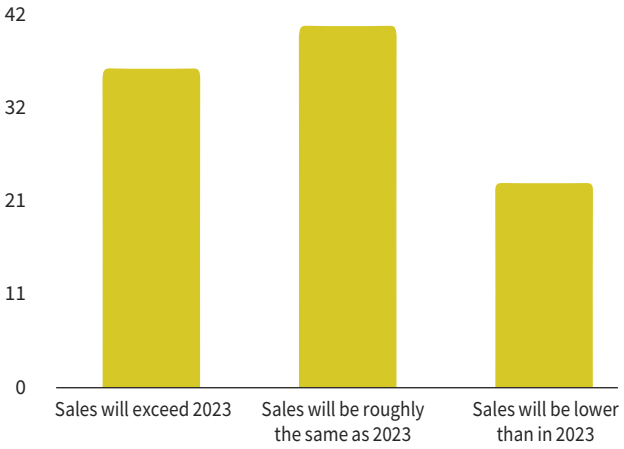
## THE JAYCO DIFFERENCE

Over 50 Years of Unmatched Performance

- PRODUCT DESIGN
- QUALITY CONSTRUCTION
- DEALER SUPPORT
- 100% PDI & SERVICE
- LEADING WARRANTY

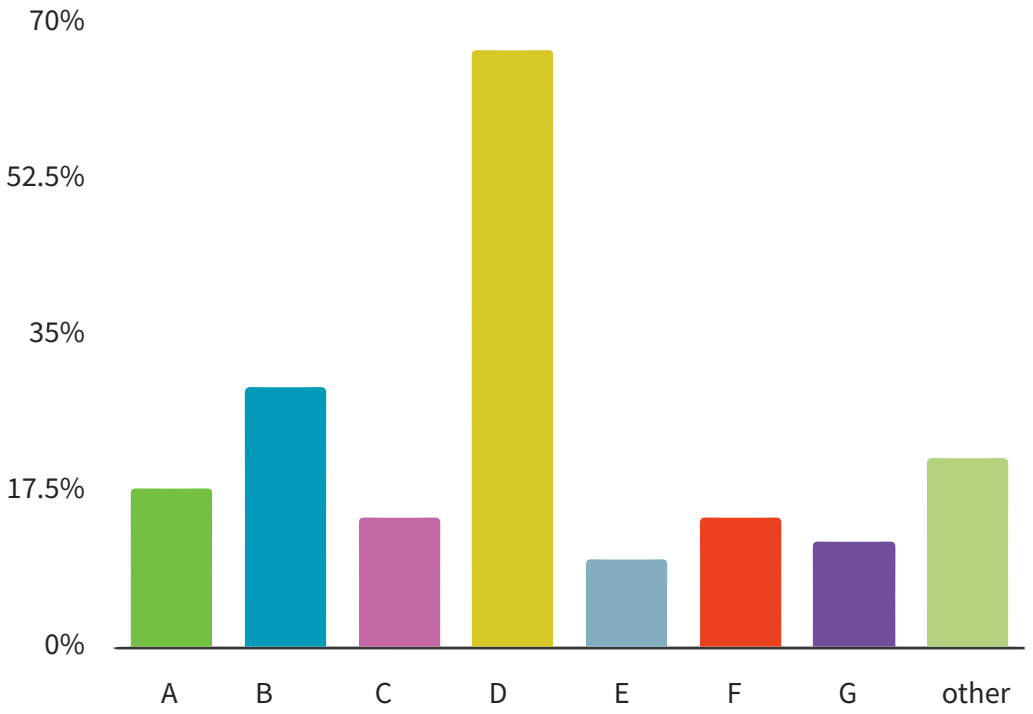
**Jayco.com**

Due to continual research and advances, manufacturer reserves the right to change specifications, design, price, and equipment without notice, and assumes no responsibility for any error in the literature. Some items shown are not included as standard or optional equipment.




## How would you expect RV sales at your dealership to fare in 2024?

| | |
|---|---|
| Sales will exceed 2023 | 36% |
| Sales will be roughly the same as 2023 | 41% |
| Sales will be lower than in 2023 | 23% |




## What are the greatest issues facing your dealership in 2024? Choose 3 answers.

| | |
|---|---|
| A. Competition | 17.88% |
| B. Labor | 29.14% |
| C. Inventory | 14.57% |
| D. Inflation | 66.89% |
| E. Consolidation | 9.93% |
| F. Supply Chain | 14.57% |
| G. Government Regulation | 11.92% |
| *Other (please specify) | 21.19% |

"Other" answers included: interest rates (mentioned by the most respondents), election year, gas prices, consumer confidence, and finding quality team members

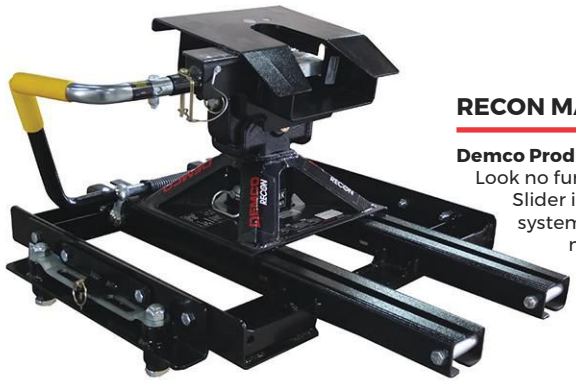
# NEW PRODUCTS

## RV SOUND SYSTEM

**ASA Electronics,** Elkhart, Indiana, offers Ghost Audio, a "speakerless" sound solution for recreational vehicles. Transforming RV design, Ghost Audio mounts transducers to RV walls and utilizes a subwoofer for low frequencies, replicating the audio experience of private jets. The technology employs Bongiovi DPS tuning software for high-fidelity audio. With no traditional speakers, this innovation offers flexibility in placement and delivers sound quality comparable to premium audio systems, setting a new standard for RV audio.

**asaelectronics.com**



## RECON MANUAL SLIDER

**Demco Products,** Boyden, Iowa, presents its Recon Slider for OE Pucks. Look no further than the Demco 21K Recon Manual Slider. The Recon Slider is now available for the Ford, Chevy and Ram OEM prep systems. Instead of an install that takes hours, it now only takes minutes. By utilizing factory puck systems, removal is just as easy, including the capability to come apart in two pieces. Featuring a removable double pivot head, adjustable height settings and 360-degree jaw. Made in the USA.

**demco-products.com**

## LITHIUM POWER PACK

**Battle Born Batteries,** Reno, Nevada, offers its Lithium Power Pack 6500. The Battle Born Batteries Lithium Power Pack 6500 is the ultimate generator replacement and all-in-one power solution for RVs, vans and other mobile, off-grid and industrial applications. Designed to mimic the dimensions and mounting points of traditional RV generators, the LPP6500 is clean, silent, safe and pre-wired with 540 Ah of LiFePO4 batteries, an inverter charger, solar charge controller and DC-DC charger for seamless installation.

**battlebornbatteries.com**

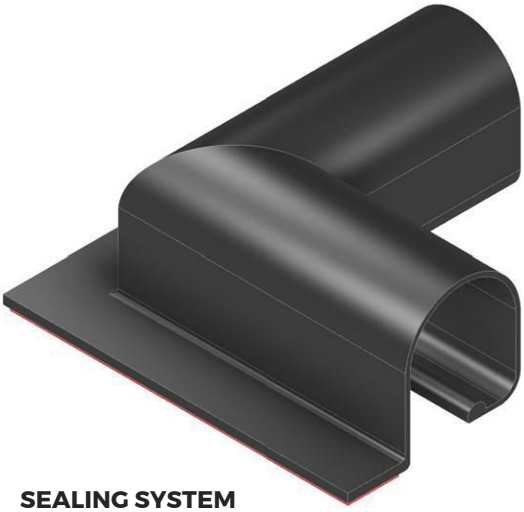





## MUD FLAP SYSTEM

**Blue Ox,** Pender, Nebraska, presents its Blue Ox Mud Flap System. Protect what you tow from rocks, mud and debris. Designed for motorhome and truck applications. Includes forged aluminum hub and arms, stainless sleeved steel rods, stainless steel and zinc nickel hardware. Dimensions are 3/8-inch thick, 24 inches by 24 inches wide, with fiber reinforced mud flaps. Rock screen accessory included.

**blueox.com**



## SEALING SYSTEM

**Jaeger-UniTek Sealing Solutions,** Hannover, Germany, offers its StyleCap. As the latest addition to the comprehensive Flip 'N Seal Slide-Out System, the StyleCap is poised to set new standards in 2024 models. Developed as an addition to the Flip 'N Seal system, the StyleCap seamlessly combines a polished finish with enhanced sealing at slideout corners, satisfying the demand for elevated consumer styling and superior sealing performance.

**jaeger-unitek.com**




## HITCH & COUPLER

**GEN-Y HITCH,** Nappanee, Indiana, introduces its EXECUTIVE Torsion-Flex with SnapLatch Coupler, designed to enhance your towing experience. The EXECUTIVE is patented with Torsion-Flex technology and is designed with GEN-Y's SnapLatch Coupler. With a simple installation, this American-made hitch creates a smooth ride when towing. The casted steel coupler is the safest on the market with a simple latch design. When latching on, the ball will guide itself onto the coupler and will lock into position, keeping it secure and safe.

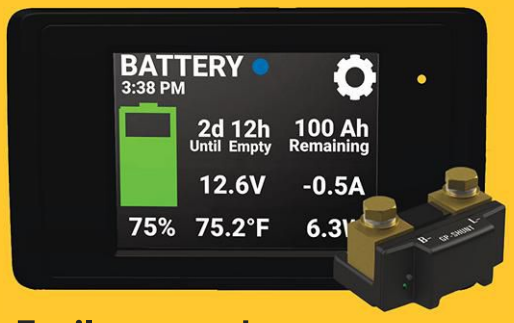
**genyhitch.com**


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Easily upgrade any battery bank.

The Go Power! Battery Manager is an easy upgrade that takes only a few minutes to install. Add smart functionality to older battery banks. Better understand battery use and power patterns with an intuitive touch-screen interface and smart shunt.

- Built-in light sensor for automatic dimming throughout the day.
- Includes a 500A shunt
- Mobile app support
- Touch screen color display
- Multiple orientation options






## INDEPENDENT PUMP DRIVE SYSTEM

**Magnum Venus Products (MVP),** Knoxville, Tennessee, presents its Independent Pump Drive (IPD) System, which consists of a PLC controller, main hydraulic unit and MVP's precision fluid sections. When paired together, the system will precisely mix/meter up to six components in a range of rates. It includes up to six fluid sections that can be configured per unit, with output ranges from 50 to 22,500 cubic centimeters (0.015 to 6.0 gallons per minute) per fluid section, fluid pressures from 100 to 2700 pounds per square inch (psi), and 10 to 100:1 ratio range. It has 1% accuracy, with +/- 5 cc per minute delivery accuracy. It also features guided, direct driven fluid sections for low maintenance and high reliability, high accuracy encoders for precision control of ratios/outputs. All parameters are dependent on material characteristics and fluid section configuration.

**mvpind.com**




## RV ROOF COATING

**LaSalle Bristol,** Elkhart, Indiana, offers its XTRM Ply RV Roof Coating. Unlike other roof coating products, the American-made topcoat requires no primer, a feature loved by RV techs and owners alike. With only one year in the market, XTRM Ply Roof Coating, a water-based acrylic marvel, has already proved to renew and extend RV roof life. Offering durability, UV protection and compatibility with various roofs, it's a high-elasticity, environmentally friendly solution covering 160 to 200 square feet per gallon. Elevate your RV experience with XTRM Ply – the future of hassle-free roof coatings.

**lasallebristol.com**






## AIR & WATER HEATING SYSTEM

**NTP-STAG,** Exeter, Pennsylvania, offers its Aqua-Hot Gen1, a compact Forced Air Heating and Water Heater system in an all-in-one unit. The Aqua-Hot Gen1 is a multipurpose, single appliance designed to save space and weight in a vehicle while still providing the highest level of environmental comfort as well as 2.64 gallons of hot water. It can heat water independently of the furnace, keeping RV owners comfortable year-round.

**viantp.com**




## LITHIUM BATTERIES

**PowerMax Converters,** Bradenton, Florida, introduces the PMLB Series of quality lithium batteries. PowerMax lithium batteries are available in 12 volt and 10, 20, 30, 50, 100, 150, 200 or 260 amp. They are also available in 24 volt, 100 amp and 48 volt, 50 amp. The PMLB Series also features BMS, Bluetooth and a heating element. The PMLB Series lithium batteries are a companion to the PowerMax line of quality converters/chargers, power centers, inverters and transfer switches.

**powermaxconverters.com**

CHECK OUT OUR New PRODUCTS!

RETAIL READY PACKAGING

6-PACK SKYLIGHT SEALANT




#SR140BX
6-Pack of Skylight Sealant in a retail ready box. Each 10.3 oz tube of white butyl sealant is approved for skylight installation, and is compatible with all roof types.

SKY BOX 5-PACK



#SL1422BX
A retail ready display box with an assortment of white, clear and smoke skylights. The box comes pre-loaded with 5 skylights in our best selling size 14"x22".

SKYLIGHT SHADES
*Available in Three Sizes!*



Thermo Shield Shade 22x30
Part #SLS2230B

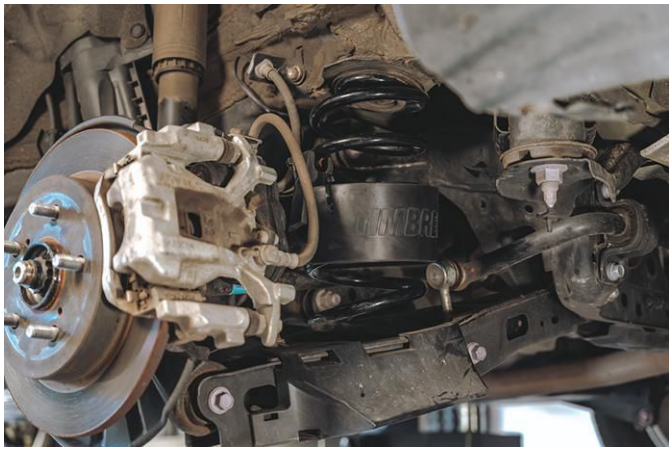
Thermo Shield Shade
14x14 | Part #SLS1414B

Thermo Shield
14x22 | Part #SLS1422B
Standard Shade
14x22 | Part #SLS1422

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## WATERPROOF AIR STATION

**Scanstrut,** Westbrook, Connecticut, offers its Scanstrut ATMOS 12V Built-In Air Station. Revolutionize your RV or van journey with ATMOS by Scanstrut – a waterproof, integrated air station designed for paddleboards, awnings and other inflatables. This sleek, built-in system is the key to maximizing on-the-road experiences. With just a button push, ATMOS effortlessly inflates (and deflates) your gear. Set the desired pressure, and let Scanstrut's waterproof outdoor technology handle the rest. Elevate your adventure with ATMOS, engineered to thrive in the demanding outdoor environment.

**scanstrut.com**

## COIL ENHANCER

**Timbren Industries,** Whitby, Ontario, Canada, introduces its newest product, the SES Coil Enhancer CE10G45P. RV manufacturers are designing smaller, lighter units to meet the demands of the growing CUV market. Timbren's new product addresses this change. It is built for the Toyota RAV4 and Honda CR-V. The coil enhancer absorbs and dissipates the shock from rough road conditions, whether the vehicle is loaded or unloaded, and provides greater driving stability while extending the life of coil springs and the suspension system.

**timbren.com**










## FRESH WATER SYSTEM

**Valterra Products,** Mission Hills, California, offers its AquaFRESH Performance Fresh Water System, which includes everything you need to upgrade your RV's water system for high flow and clean water. The two high-pressure drinking water hoses deliver 80% more flow than standard hoses, and the exterior in-line water filter limits bacterial growth and removes chlorine, taste and odor. The high-flow water regulator increases water volume and flow rate to the RV and regulates water pressure to a safe level for all RVs. Not recommended for older RVs.

**valterra.com**

## HOLDING TANK TREATMENT

**Camco,** Greensboro, North Carolina, presents its TST PRO RV Holding Tank Treatment. TST PRO is Camco's newest black water drop-in treatment. The breakthrough enzyme formula eliminates odors and breaks down waste and tissue, stopping frustrating clogs and backups. Plus, it keeps your tank sensor probes in top condition. It comes in a fresh pine scent, bringing the outdoors right into your RV.

**camcodealer.com**

www.marshallexcelsior.com/rvandcampingequipment

OUTDOOR LIFESTYLE MADE SIMPLE

MEC

Conversion Kits

for
Coleman® Roadtrip®
and Weber® Q
portable propane grills

MADE IN THE USA | 5 YEAR NO HASSLE WARRANTY | 100% HAND TESTED







## PIZZA OVEN

**Suburban,** an Airxcel brand, Dayton, Tennessee, offers its Suburban Pizza Oven. Take the delights of fresh baked pizza on the road with the Suburban Pizza Oven. The pizza oven easily attaches to Suburban's 18-inch griddle. Suburban's pizza oven features stainless steel construction and a removable 13-inch-by-13-inch pizza stone for quick cleanup, plus an integrated thermometer for baking perfection on thin crust, Neapolitan, deep dish or off-the-shelf frozen pizzas. When not in use, Suburban's pizza oven stores away in the included zippered stow-and-carry bag. The pizza oven comes with a two-year limited warranty.

**suburbanrv.com**

## STREAK REMOVER

**Walex Products Co.,** Leland, North Carolina, introduces a new premium Black Streak Remover, designed to clean and remove stubborn black streaks from sidewalls caused by oxidation runoff. This powerful formula also removes the toughest bug residue. Walex Black Streak Remover is available in three sizes: a 32-ounce spray bottle and 64-ounce and 1-gallon refills. Rebrand your cleaner section with all Walex Premium RV/Marine cleaners, including Black Streak Remover, Rubber Roof Cleaner and Conditioner, Awning Cleaner, Mold & Mildew Remover, Kitchen & Bath Cleaner, and Toilet Bowl Cleaner.

**walex.com**





## AC SYSTEM

**Truma,** Elkhart, Indiana, offers its Truma Saphir, an under-the-bench air conditioning system with heating capability for year-round comfort. This system is designed to create a sleek look by removing the air conditioner from the roof and eliminating the need for large wall cutouts. Flexible ducted installation allows you to install air outlets near the floor, ceiling or both for optimal distribution of cool or warm air. Night mode maintains the set temperature without excess interior or exterior noise for restful sleep.

**truma.com**




## ROUTER & WI-FI EXTENDER

**KING,** Bloomington, Minnesota, presents its KING Passport Mobile Cellular Router + Wi-Fi Extender. This all-in-one, multisource cellular router and Wi-Fi extender allows you to choose from a range of affordable, customizable data plans. It acquires the strongest signal available from any cell tower on all major carriers. One device, one plan, multiple networks and no SIM card needed.

**kingconnect.com**







## PIGTAIL HOSE KITS

**Marshall Excelsior Co.,** Marshall, Michigan, offers its 2-Pack Thermoplastic LP Pigtail Hoses in six different pigtail hose kits. Available lengths are 15 inches and 24 inches. The MER425 (standard flow) and MER425H (high flow) pigtails connect the propane tanks to the auto changeover regulator. The MER426 modes is used to connect a 20- or 30-pound refillable propane tank to the regulator on a camper.

**marshallexcelsior.com**



## ACRYLIC CAPPED SHEET

**Trinseo,** Wayne, Pennsylvania, offers its INDURO Acrylic Capped Sheet. Manufactured in Florence, Kentucky, INDURO Acrylic Capped Sheet is a new addition to Trinseo's material solutions portfolio, resulting from the acquisition of Aristech Surfaces. It offers a superior strength solution for a range of applications within the recreational vehicle and mobility markets. Providing superior protection from UV damage and chalking, INDURO offers five times greater surface finish layer qualities over TPO and gel coat. It also holds greater color retention and gloss level surface finish durability.

**aristechsurfaces.com**

## DC COMPRESSOR RV REFRIGERATOR

**Norcold,** Ann Arbor, Michigan, introduces the Polar Value series of DC Compressor refrigerators this spring. The Polar Value Series provides an affordable option without sacrificing fit, features and performance. The new NV10DC fits the same cutouts as the existing Polar N10DC and N8XF models. Features include adjustable shelves with risers, clear bins, dual crisper drawers and recessed doors with a travel latch. This lightweight model performs better than most 12-volt DC with a typical 5-amp draw.

**norcold.com**





## JACK PADS

**Stromberg Carlson,** Traverse City, Michigan, presents its Base Pad Scissor Jack Shoe. Stromberg's new scissor jack shoes remain securely attached. No more storing and handling dirty jack pads. The two-pack pads are specifically designed for all RV scissor jacks with bow tie bases. They increase surface contact over 130%, adding traction to ground or block. The scissor jack shoe is molded EPDM rubber (not crumb rubber) that won't crack or break and returns to its shape. Fear no rock or root in your site. Built in drain holes release water. Made in the USA.

**strombergcarlson.com**


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BREEZONIC A/C SYSTEM*

ENERGY EFFICIENT, ECOLOGICAL, QUIET

The powerful Breezonic air-conditioning system ensures comfortable temperatures in recreational vehicles and camper vans at all times.

NOTE: Scheduled for release Q3 2024.

eberspaecher-motorhomes.com/ca/en

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Universal Replacement!

Replaces All Brands/Models of LP Gas Detectors and Dual CO/LP Gas Alarms.




Surface Mount Models:
85-741-WT-TR (White)
85-741-BL-TR (Black)

85-741 includes a trim ring that covers previous installation cutouts.

Learn more at STAdealer.com



## PULL-DOWN KITCHEN FAUCET

**Dura Faucet,** Camas, Washington, offers its DF-MK530SLK-MBRG. Add style with this pull-down kitchen faucet that features a smooth-turning single handle for quick and precise control over temperature and stream strength. Detachable sprayer toggles between aerated and spray stream functions to provide full sink access and securely locks into place. The durable ceramic disc cartridge provides leak-free operation. An optional base plate is included to accommodate single- or three-hole sink tops on this lead-free faucet. This CUPC certified faucet comes with the Dura Faucet Limited Lifetime Warranty.

**durafaucet.com**



## PORTABLE WASTE TANKS

**Duraflex,** Exeter, Pennsylvania, presents its Gator tote tanks, a new option for hassle-free wastewater management at your campsite. With models ranging from 6 to 38 gallons, these tanks are engineered into ergonomically designed tank bodies and feature industrial-grade 12-inch rubber wheels for simple lifting and towing over uneven terrain. Additional functional features include a quick-release gate valve, standard garden hose connection, padded handle and premium accessory kit, varying by model. Gator tote tanks are backed with a full three-year limited warranty.

**duraflex-products.com**



## REAR STORAGE SYSTEM

**Flarespace,** Birmingham, Alabama, offers its new nVader Rack, a rear storage system. Configure the rack to suit your exact needs. Bikes, skis, cargo boxes, spare wheel and tire – the nVader carries it all. Fits 2019 to current model year Mercedes-Benz Sprinters. Get a free tire bucket when you purchase both sides. Check out all the accessories the company offers for the nVader Rack, especially the new ski rack.

**flarespace.com**



Breezonic Air Conditioning System

## AC SYSTEM

**Eberspächer Climate,** Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, presents its Breezonic AC System. Unveiling the Breezonic AC System from Eberspächer, a sleek aerodynamic rooftop plug-and-play marvel designed for RVs. Choose from two versions – 13,500 Btu/hr or 15,000 Btu/hr. It combines cooling and heating by means of a heat pump function with reversible circulation. System features user-friendly controls; quiet, efficient operation; and low inrush current due to current inverter technology and dehumidification. Operating on eco-friendly R32 refrigerant, it blends seamlessly with the Eberspächer Hydronic AquaSystem. Available this year for all-season comfort.

**eberspaecher-motorhomes.com**



## USB-C CHARGING PORT

**Micro-Air,** Allentown, New Jersey, offers its Dual USB-C Stingray. Upgrade your RV with the Dual USB-C Stingray, the latest in charging technology. This slim design allows for charging in any location, from your bedroom to the living room or even in the RV cabin. Includes two USB-C charging ports and mounting hardware for easy installation.

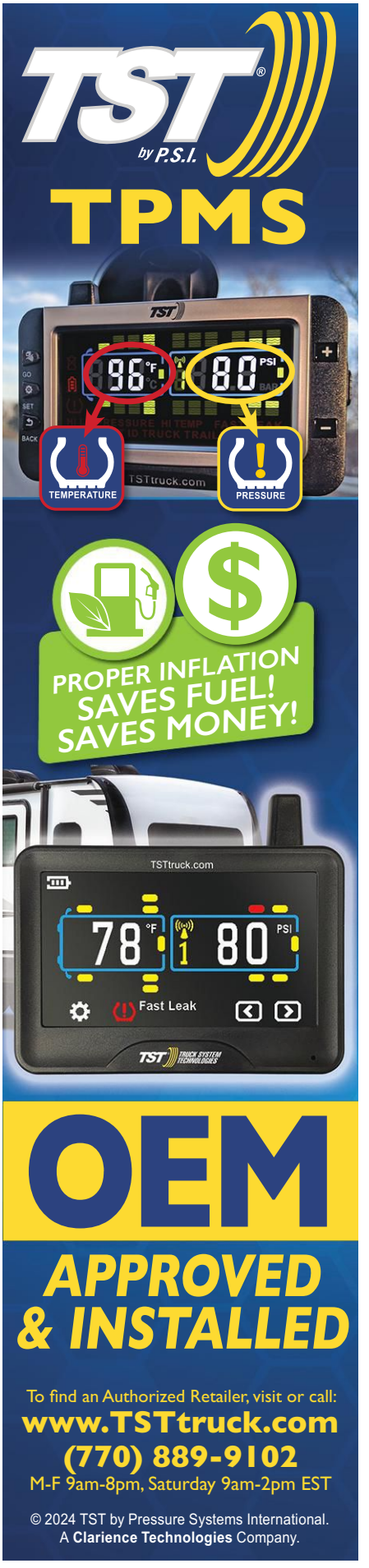
**microair.net**



## TRAILER CONNECTORS & ACCESSORIES

**Pollak,** Long Island City, New York, introduces a new line of trailer connectors, adapters and accessories. The Pollak Pro line of precision-engineered trailer connectors, adapters, extensions and accessories have been specifically designed for towing with light- and medium-duty trucks and SUVs. Additionally, Pollak offers a variety of specialized products for specific needs, like the Pro Secure LED, the Pollak Quick ConneXion for easier and quicker connections, and the Pollak ProFlex with multiple ports to tow trailers with different types of connectors.

**pollaktowing.com**

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Stop Odors Dead in Their Tracks with Travel Jon® Blue Max




Take control of bothersome odors with long lasting, fresh smelling Travel Jon® Blue Max! Blue Max quickly and safely neutralizes odor causing compounds. Just one packet cleans and deodorizes for up to one full week.

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INNOVATIVE HEAT & SOUND CONTROL SOLUTIONS

PRE-CUT VAN HEAT & SOUND CONTROL KITS
SPRINTER • PROMASTER • TRANSIT
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BOOM MAT
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800.264.9472 DesignEngineering.com
DEI DESIGN ENGINEERING, INC.



## BLACKOUT FABRICS

**Richloom,** New York, New York, presents its Richloom Blackout Library, a much-anticipated collection of woven and printed blackouts for RV interiors. The library includes patterns ranging from small-scale textures to decorative prints, in a variety of time-tested colorways. Blackouts are coated and expertly designed to block light from entering windows, providing the ultimate privacy for any RV space.

**richloom.com**



## UV-RESISTANT COMPOSITE

**LAMILUX Composites,** Rehau, Germany, offers its LAMILUX SUNSATION. LAMILUX SUNSATION, a fiber-reinforced composite, redefines the standard for outdoor applications. The 20-fold higher UV stability compared to standard GRP expands the horizon in terms of image, appearance, maintenance and value. Whether for recreational vehicles or trucks, even after many years in the sun, LAMILUX SUNSATION looks like new and enables maximum value retention.

**lamilux.com**



## RV WATER PUMPS

**InVision,** an Airxcel brand, Elkhart, Indiana, presents a new line of RV water pumps, including the Aqua Pump (3.0 gallons per minute) and the Aqua Max Pump (3.5 gallons per minute). Both InVision water pumps have self-priming features and built-in sensors to start and stop automatically for easy owner use, plus the ability to run dry without causing damage. InVision water pumps have high flow rates and a long warranty.

**invisionRVproducts.com**



## BOTTOM FREEZER RV REFRIGERATOR

**Recreational Living for GE Appliances,** Louisville, Kentucky, presents its GE Profile Glass Finish Fridge. Upgrade your RV with this sleek 12-volt DC bottom freezer refrigerator featuring a modern design and a stylish reflective glass finish. This 10-cubic-foot refrigerator is available in black with glass finish and stainless steel with glass finish. The PBV10 requires no external ventilation and has zero clearance because of a bottom ventilation design. Other features include integrated door latches, an easy-access power switch and a turbo cool setting that circulates an extra boost of cold air.

**geappliances.com**

## RV KITCHEN FAUCET



**Empire Faucets,** Cleveland, Ohio, offers its RV kitchen faucet model SL7000BMT-A, a single lever faucet with a gooseneck spout, heavy-duty stainless-steel design and a smudge-resistant matte black finish. It has a high-quality diamond ceramic disc cartridge and supply lines specifically intended to fit RV plumbing. Designed for single- or three-hole installation and easy to DIY. Optional insta-spray aerator and deckplate included.

**empfaucets.com**




## SOLAR POWER SYSTEM

**Samlex America,** Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada, presents its new Samlex RV Solar + Power Bundles. Experience a new way of selling solar power systems. Select customer's RV type, power needs, number of people and time away to recommend one of three bundles: EXPLORE 200W, SHARE 400W or ENJOY 600W.

**samlexamerica.com**





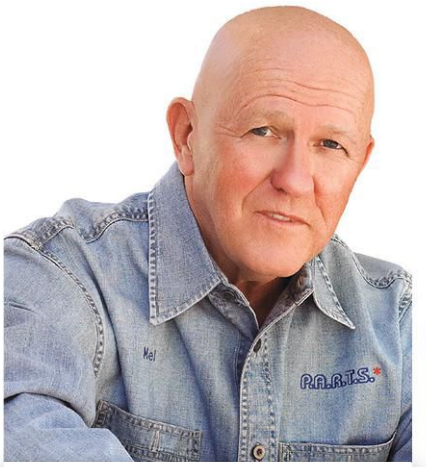




PHOTO: CHOKNITI-STOCK.ADOBE.COM

# Understanding Your **Dealership Management System**

The must-knows of DMS and how it can benefit your dealership.



**Mel Selway** is the president of P.A.R.T.S. Inc., a Sahuarita, Arizona-based firm providing business management analysis and training to retailers. He can be reached at 520-336-8606 or melselway@aol.com.

## What Does It Do?

A dealership management system can provide reports of parts and accessories inventory performance that can – and should – be reviewed by a parts manager. The software can collate data into useful formats that can identify aspects of the parts and accessories that might require action by management; however, it cannot make decisions for the manager*.

*Caveat: Future DMS applying artificial intelligence (AI) might be capable of managing a parts and accessories inventory.

## Why Should the Parts Manager Know the DMS?

The parts and accessories manager should know the capabilities and the limitations of the inventory management software so the reports

necessary to identify exceptions to the inventory can be created or applied. Perhaps an example could clarify this previous sentence. This example derives from my early years as a parts manager and illustrates the importance of knowing how the inventory management software works in order to properly and effectively manage inventory.

The year was 1979, and I had recently been hired to assist the parts manager in her duties. She had been directed to train me to use the inventory management software. She was named parts manager, yet had not been offered the training necessary to effectively understand the software, and she had not requested that training. While showing me how to generate a stock order, she remarked that the software was generating very large quantities of parts and accessories relative to the actual sales volumes and she didn't understand why that was occurring. A week or so later, she went on her honeymoon, and I was instructed to cover for her.

When I processed a stock order and reviewed some of the items for which quantities had been suggested, I compared the recommendation against the reported sales volumes and decided that the suggested quantities were too large. So I called technical support and asked what might be causing the apparent miscalculations. The support technician accessed our system, researched some setup parameters and determined that the stock order recurrence period had been set at two weeks, which was the stock order cycle for that OEM. However, the technician also determined that the suggested stock order process had not recently been finalized. This caused the software to assume that the sales history was for a two-week period, rather than the many months that had occurred since the most previous reset date. Had the parts manager contacted technical support when she noticed the apparent suggested order quantity error, she could have saved herself substantial time when processing the stock orders.

My success with contacting technical support taught me to use that resource and learn about the software capabilities and limitations. I began recording all contact with technical support, which assisted me in learning how to use the inventory management software more effectively. Eventually I was offered the opportunity to take over the position of parts manager.

## How Could the Parts Manager Learn About the DMS?

As explained in the previous section, taking advantage of the technical support function of the DMS vendor could be one method. And by developing a technical support call log to record each request, the parts manager could better understand the features and functions available within the software package.

Most computer system vendors offer training, which could be off-site at a training venue selected by the vendor or on-site at your dealership. Both the technical support and the training are usually included in the purchase and maintenance cost of the system, so it is important to use these services to get a sufficient return on your DMS investment.

There is one other training option that might not be as evident as those mentioned above. Consider interacting with other parts managers who are using the same DMS provider. They are operating the same inventory management software and must process the same types of procedures to operate their parts departments, so they could be possible sources for how to perform specific functions within the system.

## What Else Is Important?

Most DMS vendors occasionally update their software, so it is important to be aware of those updates and to review them to determine if the updates require changes to the way features and functions operate. One update type could be the data-match update, sometimes called a price update, which could be processed as frequently as each day. It also could be processed on a cycle established by the suppliers of the parts and accessories. It is important that the parts manager is made aware of any updates impacting the parts and accessories software. Most DMS software has a communications function that can automatically direct specific communications to the parts manager's inbox. I suggest that you verify that this communications function has been set up properly.

The data-match update usually contains a very important feature that the parts manager should process each time the update is generated. This is the supersede feature, which indicates items that have been changed and have been assigned a different part number. Because a supersession can be a mix-and-sell or an engineering change that doesn't permit using the old part number, the parts manager must manually determine if the old part number items can be mixed in with the new part number items or not. If this manual assignation is not processed, then the information in the database is not accurate and could result in less than efficient sales transactions.

## Who Should Be Involved?

The dealership operator (dealer principal or general manager) and the parts manager should be involved in making certain that the parts manager is taking advantage of the DMS training that is available. They should also ensure that appropriate application of the inventory management software features and functions is in place. Keep in mind that those parts and accessories represent money and that they need to be sold in order to secure a return on the inventory investment. Actual physical confirmation should be made to ensure that the inventory management software is being applied consistently and correctly. Don't assume or accept a verbal affirmation.

*To quote Lou Holtz: "When all is said and done, more is said than done."* RVP

# HATE TO WAIT

Tips for improving a customer's experience while they wait.



PHOTO: WAVHOME STUDIO–STOCK.ADOBE.COM

America's attention span changed when "Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In" started in 1968 and ran for 140 episodes until 1973. For those old enough to remember this show, it was radical in its short bursts of visual and spoken jokes. What the producers discovered was that people reacted quickly to two- to eight-second sight jokes. Up until "Laugh-In," camera shots lasted far longer.

Advertising agencies caught on quickly and started creating TV ads that had 15 to 20 visual changes in a 30-second commercial. As television changed, so did the attention span of the audience. While it was believed that the average attention span of a human being in the United States was about eight seconds – one second shorter than a goldfish – that has been disproven. We can focus longer, but the message works best in a storytelling format – something that captures our attention and imagination.

When customers are waiting for help in your service, parts and accessories areas, you have a great opportunity to tell them some stories and create a more bonded customer/RV store experience. I'm guessing many of you reading this column feel the same way when you are at a car dealership or in an endless line to check out at a store.



**Linda Cahan** is the president of Portland, Oregon-based Cahan & Co., a consulting firm that works with retailers of all sizes and categories to improve their bottom line through creative, affordable and appropriate visual merchandising, store design and renovations. For more information, visit lindacahan.com.

While I was waiting at the service counter of a car dealership, there was an iPad on a stand playing a 90-second video about a new product that cleans and preserves a PVC dashboard. It was clever, with decent background music, and told the story about how and why it was invented and why it's different from everything else on the market. By the time it was my turn to check out, I had picked up a bottle of the stuff for $9.95 and happily added it to my purchases.

Retailers know the power of checkout countertop merchandise sales. If you've ever been stuck in a long line at Best Buy or HomeGoods, you've been routed through small gondolas filled with "pickup" merchandise that is designed to entice you while you are bored or frustrated. We are all aware of this manipulation by now and can find it annoying. But what if your customers can see a lineup of "What's New Now" products while waiting for service or to check out? It can be interesting and compelling. If one of your RV parts or accessory manufacturers is introducing a new product or an interesting new feature, a short video is a great way to let your customers know about it while they wait. Some of your customers may want to download a video from a QR code linking to a website. Others will be happy to watch the video on a screen while they're waiting. Always indicate how long a video is so your customer knows whether to stick around to see the ending or to keep moving on.

If you have a large monitor in a waiting area, consider a looped video with a combination of helpful hints for maintaining an RV with new products (sponsored by your vendors) introduced between the helpful tips. If you have an idea of how long people must wait for a part, service or help, you can plan how long the video should be before it starts over again. This worked very well for Apple stores in their Genius Bar area. Personally, I was disappointed when they discontinued their video tips, replacing them with stationary photos.

Hating to wait goes for getting help, as well. Of course, you can never predict when people are going to come through the door to shop. Sometimes it's like a bus pulls up to let people out, and other times, you could hear a sales associate's entire life story before you're happily interrupted by a customer.

> "CONSIDER A KIDS' ROOM WITH A MIXTURE OF BUILDING BLOCKS, CRAYONS AND PAPER, AND AGE-APPROPRIATE VIDEOS."

When you're busy and people are waiting for help in your service/parts area, whoever is at the counter needs to acknowledge the people who are waiting. Just being seen can help someone who is feeling impatient. Often, people in a line are wondering, "Does this person have any idea that other people are waiting for help?" When the person behind the desk looks up, smiles and acknowledges those waiting, customers know they are seen and will calm down.

If you hate to wait, imagine what happens when customers come in with children. The average time they can shop is about 10 minutes before the kids get antsy. Few parents will leave their child unsupervised in a store, but when they do, it's dangerous for the children and your insurance.

If you have a small room or at least a 6-foot-by-6-foot area you can carve out in the back of your store – away from chemicals, sharp items and any doors that lead outside – consider a kids' room with a mixture of building blocks, crayons and paper, and age-appropriate videos. You can use an old DVD player and start the video when a child is "deposited" into the kid-safe room. Paint the space with calming colors, such as greens and blues, and add some soft pinks. These colors will calm the kids – at least temporarily. If the parents are comfortable leaving their offspring in that room, you'll have their undivided attention for longer than 10 minutes. But ideally, there should be a clear visual to the room so the parents can be reassured that their kid is safe. Installing carpet tiles in that room makes sense. Buy at least 20% more than you need so you can switch them out when stains occur.

If you routinely have lines in your parts area, consider asking people to take a number like they do at deli counters and at the Costco eyewear department. When more than two people are waiting in line, your parts person can look up, make eye contact, smile and ask them to take a number. This way they are acknowledged and know they will get their turn. I searched online for "Take a number machine" and found the term "ticket dispenser for Take-A-Number System." These units come with a sign as well. Once someone has their number – and are reassured that whoever is calling out the numbers is loud enough to be heard – they can wander around your accessories area (if it's nearby) and do some shopping instead of impatiently waiting in a line.

There is a trend to use hand-held devices for quick-and-easy mobile checkout. The benefit to this is convenience and especially speed if you have an indecisive customer. The downside is once they've checked out and put their card back into their wallet, they feel the shopping experience is over. Make sure they don't check out until they've seen and purchased the accessories needed to seasonalize their RV as well as needed chemicals and other add-on goodies you'd like to sell.

Don't make them hate to wait! Make their wait fun, educational and stress-free. RVP

Baggage Door Lock Upgrade

Tired of standard plunger-style locks?



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Creative Products Group is excited to introduce a true, 2-stage rotary style latching, baggage door lock featuring "secured" and "sealed" stages. The Rotary Pro has a durable die-cast metal faceplate, stainless steel latch, and high-density UV resistant plastic backplate. This Global lock comes KeyALike ready and is an "exact fit" replacement for the Challenger Nova style lock making installation a breeze. Learn more about this lock at **cpgbrands.com/product/rotary-pro/**

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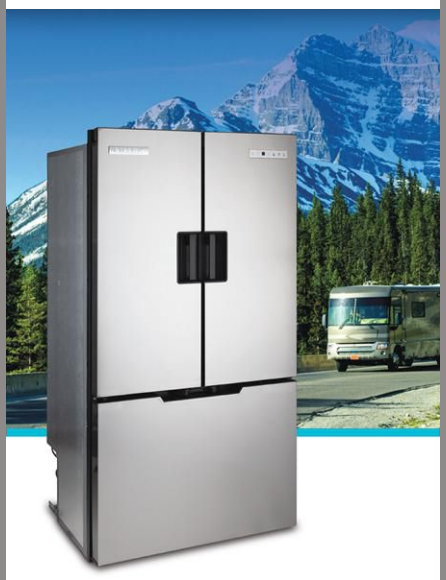
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# Pit Stop



## GET OUT & **EXPLORE**

**The Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act** passed the House Natural Resources Committee on Jan. 17 by unanimous consent. The act would:

- Enable permit streamlining to ease burdens on outfitters and guides and improve access to outdoor experiences
- Improve access to recreation on public lands and waters
- Ensure access to green spaces in underserved communities
- Develop, improve and complete long range trails
- Invest in rural economic development

**Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR)** and its members are urging swift passage of the EXPLORE Act through the House and Senate for the benefit of U.S. public lands, waters and communities.



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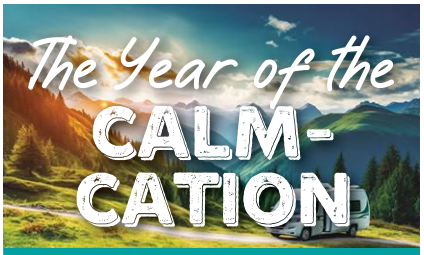
## DECEMBER 2023 SHIPMENTS

**21,522** TOTAL

**8.1%** INCREASE compared to December 2022 (19,907 units)

**2023 RV shipments ended with 313,174 units (down 36.5% compared to 2022)**

**"RV shipments for the last two months** of 2023 showed an increase over the previous year, and our projections indicate we should continue to see increased shipments and retail sales in 2024, particularly in the latter half of the year," said RVIA President and CEO Craig Kirby. "We are further encouraged by the positive attendance numbers we've already seen at consumer RV shows in 2024, with consumers expressing excitement about new features and RV product innovations."




**1 in 3 campers feel stressed** or very stressed about economic uncertainty in the year ahead, and nearly **70%** of campers are specifically craving a sense of calm and relaxation on their trips in 2024. According to Campspot, **58%** think camping offers a more significant break from everyday routines compared to other travel types, such as flights or hotel stays. Campspot unveiled its **top 10 places** to camp in 2024:

1. Denver, Colorado
2. Oxford, Florida
3. Yellowstone National Park
4. Great Smoky Mountains National Park
5. Orlando, Florida
6. Arches National Park
7. Tampa, Florida
8. Acadia National Park
9. St. Augustine, Florida
10. Phoenix, Arizona

Source: Campspot 2024 Camping Trends Outlook

## MARKET TO WATCH



The global electric bike (e-bike) market is currently valued at **$49.1 billion**. With a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.9%, the market is **projected to reach $62.3 billion** by 2023–2030.

Source: Persistence Market Research

## New RVer Resources

Kampgrounds of America (KOA) found 60% of new RVers rely on self-directed methods as their most relied-upon resources for learning about the RV lifestyle, while 52% seek on-site interactions with campground staff. 43% rely on industry expert advice and 40% find interactions with fellow RVers most helpful.

Source: KOA Odds & Ends Research Report

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