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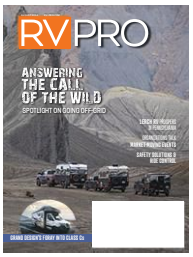
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Photo courtesy of MDC USA

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CERTIFIED AUDIENCE

RV PRO (USPS 024-712) is published monthly by Cahaba Media Group, PO Box 530067, Birmingham, AL 35223. Periodicals postage paid at Birmingham, AL and additional mailing offices. Free to qualified recipients within the United States and U.S. Possessions. Publisher reserves the right to determine qualifications. Annual Subscription Prices: U.S. – one year, $45; two years, $80; three years, $108. Canada – one year, $76; two years, $142, three years, $201 (U.S. Funds); All other countries – one year $98, two years $186, three years, $267 (U.S. funds). Customer Service, call 800-256-2785. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to RV PRO, PO Box 271, Lincolnshire, IL 60069-9835. All items submitted to RV PRO become the sole property of RV PRO and Cahaba Media Group and cannot be reproduced without the written consent of the publisher. Advertisers and/or their agencies, jointly and severally, assume all liabilities for printed advertisements in RV PRO. Opinions expressed in RV PRO may not necessarily reflect the opinion of the magazine, its management or its advertisers. Letters, photographs and manuscripts welcome.


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I don't know about you, but I could use a vacation.

The past few weeks, I've been daydreaming about mountains that dip into cool water, boat rides at sunset and playing on a lakeside beach with my daughter. As I write this, I am three weeks away from gathering with my family members at Lake George, New York, and my flight out of Alabama can't come fast enough.

But while my ideal vacation this year includes 28 people — my sister, parents, aunts, uncles and cousins — many Americans have been looking for a quieter escape from the grind. In fact, 29.8% of campers camped alone at least once last year, according to The Dyrt. This isn't surprising with the hustle and bustle and constant connectedness of today's world. In fact, more RVers are learning to seek out solitude by going off-grid, especially as campgrounds grow more crowded. The Dyrt reported that in 2022, 58.4% of their survey respondents cited the difficulty of finding an available campsite as one of the top camping hardships.

Manufacturers have noticed this trend among RVers wanting to get outside of the typical campgrounds. Turn to page 42 to get to know the latest offerings from MDC USA that will take you off-road to an off-the-beaten-path destination. And while some want to be alone, others want to go off-grid with like-minded adventure seekers. On page 36, hear from Peter Esparza and Evelyn Mendoza, who found community among Storyteller Overland owners (and check out the company's new adventure truck, the HILT). Scott Russell — our full-time RVer and on-the-road writer — shows off more rugged rigs that your customers may be interested in on page 32. And finally, what's a necessary must-have if you're looking for adventure away from everyday conveniences? A toilet, of course! Learn more about CompoCloset's compost toilet in a funny yet informative write-up on page 40.

Another must-read in this issue features Grand Design's first Class C. If your customers are not quite the rugged off-roaders, but are looking for a classy way to travel, check out the Lineage motorhome on page 20.

Next year, I think I'll have to look into all of these options instead of a tiny lakeside cabin — and I hope you also find a way to unwind and unplug soon!

As always, thank you for reading!

Jennifer King



Lake George in Upstate New York

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Lazydays Appoints New Chairman of the Board


DeVincenzi

Lazydays announced that lead independent director and former interim CEO Robert DeVincenzi has been appointed chairman of the board of directors, effective June 9.

DeVincenzi succeeds Christopher Shackelton, managing partner of Coliseum Capital Management, who has made the decision to step down as a director. Following these changes, the board will be comprised of seven directors, six of whom are independent.

"I am honored to be named board chairman at this pivotal time for Lazydays," DeVincenzi said. "Lazydays has grown into one of the largest RV dealers in the country, with an iconic brand that we believe is synonymous with premium customer service and strong partnerships with leading OEMs. I look forward to continuing to work closely with my fellow directors to advise John North and other members of management on the execution of their strategic plan designed to harness the power and scale of the Lazydays platform, drive operational excellence and create sustainable value for shareholders."

DeVincenzi added, "On behalf of the board, I would like to extend our gratitude to Chris for his dedicated service to Lazydays over the past six years. He and Coliseum have acted as thoughtful and strategic partners to the business, and thanks in large part to their support and guidance, Lazydays has established a strong foundation upon which to build."

Shackelton said, "Robert is an experienced executive and director with a thorough understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing Lazydays today. As Lazydays' largest shareholder, Coliseum remains a supportive partner of John, the entire board and the management team as they navigate the current economic environment and position the business for long-term success."

DeVincenzi was appointed to the board as lead independent director in October 2021 and served as interim CEO of Lazydays from January 2022 to September 2022. DeVincenzi currently serves as nonexecutive chairman of the board of directors of Universal Technical Institute, a nationwide provider of technical education and training, and is a principal partner in Lupine Venture Group, a business advisory firm that provides strategic consulting and corporate development advisory services. Earlier in his career, DeVincenzi served as a director as well as president and CEO of Redflex Holdings Limited and director, president and CEO of Lasercard Corporation. He received a Master of Arts from Gonzaga University in organizational leadership and a Bachelor of Science in business administration from California State University, San Luis Obispo.

NRVTA Names New Chief Operating Officer


Bradley

The National RV Training Academy (NRVTA) announced the appointment of Kelly Bradley as its new chief operating officer (COO).

With a distinguished career marked by significant achievements in the RV industry, NRVTA said Bradley is set to enhance the academy's mission of providing premier training for RV owners and professionals.

Bradley joined NRVTA with a wealth of experience and a proven track record of success. He has been brought on to lead NRVTA's 2024-25 expansion projects, which aim to open up more seats for students and develop additional benefits for association members.

"Bradley is not only a seasoned professional but also a dedicated family man, committed to his wife and three children, and a man of faith. His hands-on approach and commitment to excellence align perfectly with NRVTA's values and goals," the academy said.

"I have witnessed firsthand the exceptional quality of graduates from NRVTA and the comprehensive, hands-on training they receive. The academy's commitment to excellence is beyond compare, and I am excited to contribute to its continued success. Together, we will enhance the student experience, ensuring they are well prepared to thrive in the RV industry, whether they start their own businesses or join leading dealerships," Bradley said.

Terry "Cooper" Cooper, managing director of NRVTA, said, "Kelly's extensive experience and dedication to improving the RV industry make him the perfect fit for our team. His leadership will undoubtedly enhance our programs and further solidify NRVTA's reputation as the premier training facility for RV professionals."

As COO, Bradley will collaborate with the existing directors to further improve the educational journey of NRVTA students and provide robust support post-graduation. His goal is to ensure that NRVTA graduates continue to be highly sought after in the RV industry for their exceptional skills and knowledge.

GEN-Y Hitch Names OEM Sales Manager/Customer Service Director


Helmuth

GEN-Y Hitch announced Jason Helmuth as its OEM sales manager/customer service director.

In the over six years on the GEN-Y team, Helmuth's passion and servant-leadership as an advocate for GEN-Y customers and team members have been major factors in GEN-Y's growth, the company said in a release. As part of his new role, Helmuth will be managing the OEM channels for GEN-Y Hitch as well as being the customer service director for the entire sales force.

"I am deeply humbled and very motivated that GEN-Y has provided me with the opportunity to continue to build our customer service at a high level! In the same breath I'm stoked to lead sales on the OEM side and will be pounding the pavement to show the OEM clients our exciting lineup of revolutionary products that GEN-Y has become known for," Helmuth said.

On Helmuth taking on these roles, founder and managing partner Carl Borkholder commented, "Jason's dedication to customer service is unparalleled. His enthusiasm for the GEN-Y team is infectious, and we are fortunate to have him on board! We extend our congratulations on his new role with GEN-Y, and I am extremely excited for him and the entire team." RVP

GOT NEWS? Send your company news items to jbenschop@cahabamedia.com or mmoore@cahabamedia.com.



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RVWA Events That Educate, Empower & Inspire

The upcoming Educational Symposium and next year's Spring Campout are musts for your calendar.

BY SUSAN CARPENTER, RVWA PRESIDENT

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE RV WOMEN'S ALLIANCE

The RV Women's Alliance is renowned for its events, with two standing out as particularly impactful: the annual Spring Campout and the Educational Symposium. These gatherings are more than just events — they are opportunities for women in the RV industry to learn, laugh and network in meaningful ways.

A MEMORABLE SPRING CAMPOUT IN MAY

In May, we held our second annual Spring Campout, welcoming over 100 enthusiastic women for a weekend brimming with fun, food, games and networking opportunities. The event commenced with Bill Coughlin of Lippert leading an engaging opening session. Coughlin once again donated his time to facilitate a creative balloon game that emphasized the nuances of team building and demonstrated that leadership can come from the back, not just the front. I think everyone not only enjoyed the example but walked away with some new insights on leadership.

A highlight of the weekend was the ever-popular Campout Crawl. Participating campsites showcased their company pride with creative decorations while serving unique drinks and snacks. Our members from many different companies participated, and they did not disappoint in their spirit of the task. During this event, members were able to explore different units from the manufacturers that were present.

The campout offered more than just leisure activities. Attendees engaged in community service projects, creating dog toys for animal shelters and assisting the local Girl Scout troop in earning their fire-building badges.

The variety of activities throughout the weekend ensured that everyone could find something that suited their interests and comfort levels. Participants walked away with deeper connections to their colleagues and new acquaintances across the industry.

With near-perfect weather and fantastic company, the event was one to remember. Mark your calendars for the first weekend of May next year; we eagerly anticipate another great campout experience.



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THE 3RD ANNUAL EDUCATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

We invite you to join us Oct. 16-17 at the Westin Chicago, North Shore (new location) for our third annual Educational Symposium. This year's theme, "EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EXPRESSION: Finding and Using Your Inner Voice," promises an enriching day-and-a-half event filled with networking, meaningful projects and invaluable learning.

We are thrilled to present Amanda Gore, who will speak on "The Power of Joy." Gore is celebrated for her ability to deliver high-impact scientific information based on the latest psychology and neuroscience in a humorous and engaging manner.

Further elevating our educational offerings, we have partnered with "The Moxie Institute." The Moxie Institute has decades of experience designing and delivering customized training to global organizations and driven professionals in all areas of business communication, leadership and speaking skills. They integrate the latest research in neuroscience adult learning theory and the performing arts to ensure their clients master new skills and habits that continue to improve throughout their career and life. Every Moxie Master Trainer has over 10 years of experience and follows their industry-leading "Moxie Method" to ensure the highest quality of learning that is engaging, empowering and guaranteed to make an impact.

The Moxie Institute will teach two transformative courses. "Story Power" will teach you to organize your thoughts using their unique POWER method:

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- **W** – Write
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- **O** – Oxygenate
- **X** – 'X' Cite
- **I** – It Factor
- **E** – Enjoy

Responding to member feedback, we are also introducing "Networking with a Purpose," an event focused on a communal project that aims to give back to the community while fostering connections. Additionally, a self-defense course led by Debbie Pickus will be offered. This 90-minute session will encompass self-defense fundamentals, with an awareness segment and mindset segment, followed by a board-breaking segment.

The symposium will conclude with our Annual Awards Dinner, honoring not just the winners but also all of the remarkable finalists. Our award categories include:

- Trailblazer Lifetime Achievement
- Champion for Women (company)
- Champion for Women (individual)
- Leader of Tomorrow

We look forward to seeing both familiar and new faces, and to creating more unforgettable memories together. Tickets and more information are available at rvwa.org/events/educational-symposium. RVP

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Setting Up the RV Industry for Growth

Through training and advocacy, the RV Dealers Association works to advance success for all players.

BY PHIL INGRASSIA, RVDA PRESIDENT



Ryan Horsey, RVDA chairman



Phil Ingrassia, RVDA president

As the RV dealers and the industry adjust to new market conditions and set the stage for growth in 2025, the RV Dealers Association (RVDA) is actively working on several fronts to support dealers and the industry.

Here's a look at some key priorities for the RVDA board and staff:

DEALERSHIP EMPLOYEE EDUCATION

The Mike Molino RV Learning Center, a cornerstone of RVDA's educational efforts, recently launched a new online training course specifically for RV warranty administrators. This program addresses a critical need within dealerships, ensuring staff have the knowledge and skills to effectively serve customers who require warranty work.

The warranty administrator course joins the service/writer adviser, parts manager, and parts specialist online training available through the RV Learning Center, providing a comprehensive foundation for fixed operations professionals.

In addition, the RV Fixed Operations Today Mobile App offers five free readiness tests designed to assess the knowledge of various fixed operations personnel within an RV dealership. By taking these tests, individuals can identify their knowledge gaps and determine if they're prepared for the corresponding RV Learning Center's certification exams.

RV DEALERS CONVENTION/EXPO

The knowledge and connections gained at the RVDA Convention can provide a significant return on investment for dealers. By staying informed, building relationships and discovering new opportunities, dealers can create more profitable partnerships and find solutions to navigate a challenging RV market.

This year's convention, Nov. 11-15 at Paris Las Vegas, offers a wide range of workshops and seminars covering critical industry topics like financing, marketing, sales, service and compliance. These sessions can equip dealers with the latest knowledge and strategies to stay competitive in the ever-evolving RV market.

"BY STAYING INFORMED, BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND DISCOVERING NEW OPPORTUNITIES, DEALERS CAN CREATE MORE PROFITABLE PARTNERSHIPS AND FIND SOLUTIONS TO NAVIGATE A CHALLENGING RV MARKET."

The event also provides a platform, through Partners of Progress meetings, for dealers to meet directly with representatives from RV manufacturers. These face-to-face interactions can be crucial for building rapport and reviewing manufacturer policies, procedures and products.

More than ever, attending the 2024 convention can be a valuable investment for any RV dealer looking to stay ahead of the curve and grow their business.

ADVOCACY

RVDA actively reaches out to policymakers on issues that impact the RV industry. RVDA participated with the RV Industry Association (RVIA) in RVs Move America Week, which brought industry leaders to Capitol Hill to discuss the importance of outdoor recreation and advocate for policies that benefit RV dealerships and manufacturers. These issues included:

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- **Tax Fairness:** The industry seeks passage of the Travel Trailer and Camper Tax Parity Act, which aims to create a level playing field by ensuring towable RVs (travel trailers) and motorized RVs (motorhomes) receive equal tax treatment for dealer inventory financing interest deductions.

- **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP):** The RV industry relies on the GSP program to import lauan, a specific wood used in RV construction, duty-free from Indonesia. Advocates pushed for the reauthorization and reform of the GSP program to ensure continued access to this important material at a competitive cost.

- **De Minimis Reform:** Currently, a loophole allows for duty-free import of merchandise valued at $800 or less directly shipped from abroad. This can put American manufacturers at a disadvantage and potentially lead to lower quality parts in the market. The industry advocated for reforms that would close this loophole and create a fairer playing field.

- **Support for Outdoor Recreation:** The RV industry is a major player in the outdoor recreation market. Advocates likely voiced their support for legislation that promotes access to public lands and expands opportunities for outdoor recreation, which in turn benefits the RV industry.

Stay tuned for more from the RV Industry Association government affairs team in the September issue.

IMPROVING DEALER-MANUFACTURER RELATIONS

RVDA's 30th annual Dealer Satisfaction Index (DSI) survey is underway as of press time for this issue. This survey plays a vital role in gathering feedback from dealers on their relationships with manufacturers. The insights gleaned will be used to identify areas for improvement and foster stronger collaboration within the industry.

INDUSTRY TRENDS & BENCHMARKS

RVDA provides valuable resources to its members, including RV Executive Today and RV Executive Today Online, which feature industry news, trends and analysis.

Additionally, the association offers dealership financial benchmarks, allowing dealers to compare their performance metrics with others nationwide.

These are just a few examples of how RVDA is working to address the needs of its members and promote the RV industry. The focus on warranty administrator training highlights the association's commitment to professional development, while advocacy efforts ensure the RV industry has a strong voice in Washington, D.C.

For more information on any of these programs, visit rvda.org or send an email to info@rvda.org. RVP



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HOW RV CONSUMERS HAVE BEEN SEARCHING FOR CLASS C RVs

From 2023 to 2024, there has been a 1% increase in used Class Cs on RV Trader. In 2024 so far, there have already been 64 million more search result impressions on used Class Cs than new inventory on RV Trader.*



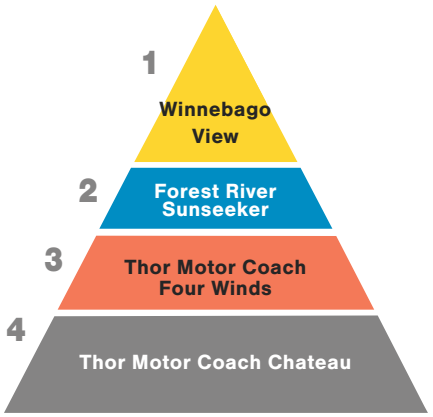
Top Class C Makes

by Search Results on RV Trader

1. **Thor Motor Coach**
2. **Winnebago**
3. **Coachmen RV**
4. **Jayco**
5. **Forest River**

Top Class C Makes/Models

by RV Trader Search Results



Based on search result impressions on RV Trader, the Forest River Sunseeker has grown to the second-most searched Class C make/model in 2024, compared to the past two years. Winnebago View has remained the most searched Class C make/model since 2022.

NEW VS. USED Class C RVs

Demand for top Class C RV brands like Thor Motor Coach, Winnebago, Coachmen, Jayco and Forest River remains strong in 2024. The market for used Class C RVs is also growing, with a 1% increase in searches and 64 million more impressions for used units compared to new ones this year. This trend highlights buyers' preferences, offering dealers a chance to focus on popular models and the demand for used diesel units between 25 and 31 feet.

Source: RV Trader

Top Length Searches for Class C



The following are the top-length searches in feet for Class C RVs from January through May 2024 on RV Trader.

1. **25 feet**
2. **24 feet**
3. **32 feet**
4. **31 feet**
5. **30 feet**

TOP CLASS C SLEEPING CAPACITY

(Based on search results)
Consumers looking for Class C RVs are most interested in units with sleeping capacities of an even number.

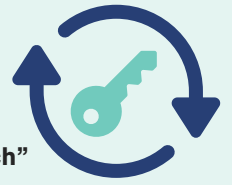
1. **6**
2. **5**
3. **8**
4. **4**
5. **7**



About RV Trader
RV Trader, a part of the renowned "Trader" family of brands and owned by Trader Interactive, is the leading marketplace for advertising RVs, motorhomes and campers. With an average of 6.5 million monthly visitors, RV Trader offers innovative tools to help manufacturers and dealers make connections with customers, increase sales and maximize profits. For more information, visit RVTraderMediaKit.com.

Consumers who have searched for Class C RVs on RV Trader have also searched for the following keywords:

- **"Used"**
- **"Diesel"**
- **"Private"**
- **"Winnebago"**
- **"Thor Motor Coach"**



**DATA ON CLASS C FROM RV TRADER IS PULLED FROM JANUARY 2024 – MAY 2024.*



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Filling Out the Family Tree

Grand Design enters the motorized segment with its first **Lineage Class C,** paying homage to its innovative roots.

BY JOHN MCCURRY

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GRAND DESIGN



Entering the motorized segment of the RV industry has always been part of Grand Design's vision since the company's inception in 2012.

That plan picked up steam in recent years and has come to fruition this summer as the innovative RV builder debuts the Lineage — a uniquely equipped Class C packed with European influences.

"We have looked at this for the better part of five years," says Tommy Hall, general manager of Grand Design's motorized division. "With the changes in the motorized segment and the way some classes are evolving, we felt it was the right time to develop our motorized division. Our plan was always to enter this market, but we were unsure of which segment. We aim to be a player and, hopefully, a market leader in all segments of Class Cs."

Winnebago Industries' — the parent company of Grand Design — CEO Michael Happe announced the brand's move into motorized last October, saying Grand Design's new product will be a "differentiated and complementary" offering to the company's Winnebago and Newmar motorized lines.

Grand Design management chose the Class C segment as its first foray into the motorized sector because it is a relatively stable market with some growth. Hall describes Class Cs as a strong sector with a robust customer base.







"We expect a lot of owners who traditionally went into Class As will be moving into the Super C segment," he says. "That's why we chose to be players in the C and B markets."

The name "Lineage" is the brainchild of Hall and Grand Design's marketing department. "Lineage is rooted in family history," Hall says, "and it fits with the company's next step."

Danie Antonelli, Grand Design's vice president of marketing, adds, "History is what you look back on. Lineage is what you pass forward. It ties back to our family of customers."

European aesthetic is the dominant theme in Lineage's interior. This includes a dark ceiling, a neutral palette, recessed hardware on cabinets and square fixtures. "Lineage will be the first Class C to offer these design traits," Hall notes.

Other features include a 70-inch-by-80-inch king bed, which is bigger than those used by most competitors, and dedicated air conditioning in the bunk over the cab. It also includes an aerodynamic front cap with custom interior molded plastics and a MORryde steel chassis conversion, custom exterior luggage doors and hydraulic leveling jacks.

The end result is a product based largely on customer feedback. The emphasis was on building something unique.

"We wanted to avoid features Class Cs had in the past but also include things that differentiate our product from the competition," Hall says.

European styling offers a different look for the Class C segment in the U.S., which Hall says generally looks the same.

"Dark ceilings are the big thing in European motorized RVs. I don't want to say the Class C segment of the industry has become stale, but it has become very traditional over the last few years."

When deciding on the chassis for Lineage, availability was a key factor. Chassis have been challenging to obtain in recent years due to supply chain issues post-COVID. Ultimately, another European influence prevailed.

"When we started planning that phase of the build, we were easily able to partner with Mercedes and get the Mercedes chassis cutaway for our first Class C," Hall says. "Traditionally, everyone builds on a 3500, but we will go to market on a 4500. It gives us roughly 1,000 pounds more carrying capacity than a lot of competitors in the Sprinter Class C market. We are excited about that."

The Mercedes Sprinter Cab chassis, produced in Germany, is a four-cylinder twin-turbo diesel/12,125 GVWR (gross vehicle weight rating). Hall says Grand Design is open to using other platforms such as Ford or RAM, as long as they fit the line of products the company wants to build.

Hall is in the process of building a dealer network for Lineage. The focus will be on the top 40 to 50 markets in the U.S., with possible eventual expansion into Canada. The early reaction is one of excitement among dealers.

"My phone is constantly ringing. We have a good start in identifying some partners, although we have not made a ton of commitments yet. The resounding feedback I have been getting is that they are looking for a quality Class C and B van they can add to their lot without a lot of service issues."

Units were scheduled to begin rolling off the production line in mid- or late July with shipping in August. They will start hitting dealer lots in late August. The public got its first glimpse of Lineage at a glamping event in New York City's Bryant Park







in June. The model will make its consumer show debut at Pennsylvania's Hershey RV Show Sept. 11-15. It will also be on display later in September at the Open House in Elkhart, Indiana, before making the rounds of consumer shows during the first quarter of 2025.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

So, who are the target customers for Lineage? Hall says it can be anyone.

"I am someone who believes that anyone who has the desire and likes the look of our product is a potential customer. That is especially true for someone who wants to be part of the Grand Design family. We are coming out with different segments that I think will hit each demographic of customers. This first product can be for a single individual, or a couple, or a small family who wants to use it for its off-grid capabilities or weekend trips to visit the grandparents."

Hall says Lineage is not for customers heavy into towing, nor is it for those interested in extreme off-roading — but the product is being developed in a way that meets the demands of a wide customer base.

The MSRP range on the Lineage Series M starts at $189,000 up to $225,000. Grand Design plans to build a few hundred Lineage units during the second half of 2024. All will be built at the company's Plant 15 at its Middlebury, Indiana, campus. As the company expands its motorized effort to include Class B vans, another plant on the campus will be used.

Over the next 18 to 24 months, Grand Design plans to grow its presence in the Class C market and will touch on Super Cs and traditional gas Cs. Hall says the company hopes to enter the B van market with a couple of models and price segments sometime next year.

"We will have a pretty good lineup of products that can compete in the marketplace," Hall says. RVP

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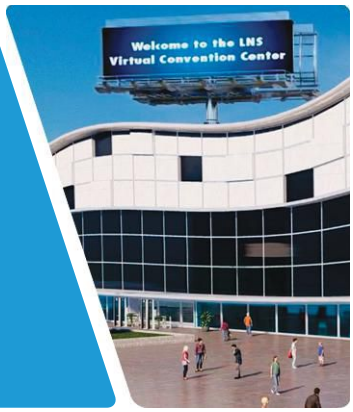
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LERCH RV'S LESSONS IN SUCCESS

This Pennsylvania dealership celebrates a successful focus on towables, a partnership with Penn State and positive customer feedback.

BY MIKE HARBOUR

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LERCH RV



Mistakes and successes go hand in hand, and Ed Lerch isn't ashamed to admit it.

The founder of Lerch RV, a nearly 50-year-old dealership in central Pennsylvania's bucolic Big Valley, recalls two such mistakes, and resulting successes, centered on expansion and inventory.

"In 1980, I ventured into a second dealership and incorporated under the name Recreation Vehicle Centers, Inc., with the idea that I was going to have whole lots of dealerships. One bad experience with the second lot and I refocused on one location," he says. "Shortly after we did really well with trailers, I did take on motorhomes and pop-up trailers. It really wasn't until about 2000, after I had been in business for 20-something years, that I saw that it would be much better to just focus on towables."

When Lerch RV became a travel trailer- and fifth wheel-only dealer, it also moved to its present 25-acre site north of Lewistown, Pennsylvania. The location, a former cornfield, sits alongside U.S. Route 322, a busy highway that traverses the Keystone State from east to west, and allowed Lerch to design and build a sales and service facility completely from scratch.

"Once we moved to this location in 2000, we stuck with popular-selling product lines. We were a Fleetwood dealer when it was big and then we took on Sprinter and Keystone lines, and since the pandemic, we've been doing a lot of Forest River brands," Lerch says.

The Lewistown native, who graduated from nearby Penn State University just before opening his dealership, realized his accounting degree wasn't enough to make his enterprise reach its full potential. He eventually corrected that mistake, too.

"After I was in business about 15 years, I finally was talked into going to a Spader business seminar where Duane Spader raised my focus from instead of being cheap and superlow prices and not making any money to really becoming much more successful," Lerch says. "That was definitely a life-changing moment for me. Something that I've always been thankful for is what I learned from Duane Spader."

After Lerch returned from the seminar, he headed into work two hours early every day for a while just to work with numbers,







Founder Ed Lerch and wife Nancy Lerch pose with Penn State's Nittany Lion.



Ed Lerch (middle) with daughters Staci Arble (left) and Stephanie Reeder (right).

he recalls, noting the experience opened his eyes to something he never thought was possible.

No doubt those lessons learned, plus the pandemic, later helped the dealership sell almost 800 units in 2021, a record high. Sales have slowed considerably since, according to Lerch, as the store moved just 466 units last year, but there are still plenty of successes he believes will keep Lerch RV going well into the future.

"We have tremendous longevity with our employees. We have techs who have come in as teenagers and they're in [their] fifties now. We have multiple techs with 30-plus years of experience," he says. "The youngest, newest tech we have has probably close to two years of experience, and he's the son of our shop foreman. We really have very, very little employee turnover at the dealership."

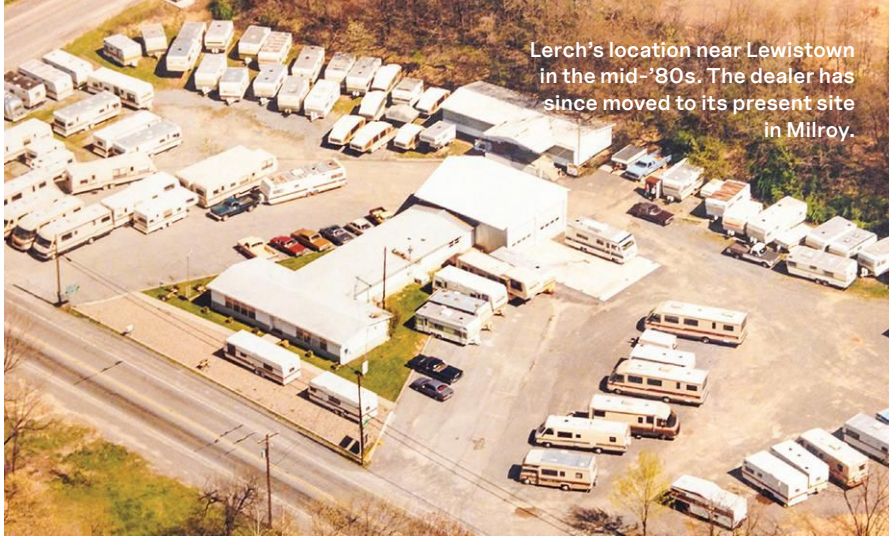
Having tenured technicians on staff has several benefits, according to Lerch, but one of them stands out for customers.

"We assign techs for life on each unit. If a customer buys a unit from us, the tech that preps it is the tech that shows that customer through the unit," he says. "When the customer comes in the next year for warranty work or an inspection, the customer will generally get the same tech and will build a relationship with that tech."

The tech-for-life offering isn't the only notable advantage the shop offers; besides having a remarkable 32 bays, each bay is 22 feet wide so units can be serviced with slides extended on both sides as needed. Lerch RV can handle most every maintenance or rebuild job; major paint, body and motorhome chassis work is contracted elsewhere. In addition to long-serving technicians, Lerch's service supervisor and shop foreman have extensive RV backgrounds, too, with a combined 69-plus years between them.

After several years of chart-topping RV sales recently ended, Lerch has noticed a situation the service side hasn't seen until now.

"For the first time in our lives, us dealers are finding out that we have excess service capacity," Lerch says. "We're sort of struggling sometimes to keep 10 techs busy. I think everybody overexpanded



Lerch's location near Lewistown in the mid-'80s. The dealer has since moved to its present site in Milroy.

when the pandemic hit, and because of that, there's excess capacity out there right now."

He'd definitely hire more technicians if he could keep them busy, but true to his accounting roots, Lerch notes the shop isn't as efficient and profitable as it was a few years ago when work was piling up. Geography, according to him, plays a large role.

"We're in a rural, economically depressed area in one of the poorest counties in the state. There's no big market near us, but we draw from a larger area, so a lot of our customers are coming from one, two, three hours away. That affects the service end of it, too, because we don't have a big local service market. We have excellent service, but the service is driven by sales, primarily, and not by the guy that wants to come in for an inspection or [to get] his air conditioner checked out," Lerch says.

Unlike some dealerships, Lerch RV does not have dedicated pre-delivery inspection (PDI) bays. Such work, as is the arrangement elsewhere, is done by newer technicians so the more experienced ones can handle more specialized work.

"One thing that we do, and we're not the only ones that do it, [but] we're adamant about it is having the techs do their own show-throughs," he says of customer deliveries. "We don't have some old guy coming in who's semiretired to do the show-throughs, so the techs show through each unit."

Lerch also uses a hybrid pay system to compensate his technicians — an hourly rate plus a bonus — that's a variation of Spader's own Collect-able Labor methodology designed to improve service department efficiency.

Lerch RV has a well-equipped, 2,500-square-foot parts department run by just two employees. The lean approach works well for Lerch, as parts, like in many other dealerships, runs behind sales, service and finance and insurance (F&I) in revenue. The parts team does most of the merchandising, while the remainder is set by distributor Keller Marine & RV, another Pennsylvania institution located just an hour east of the store.

Today, Lerch co-owns the dealership, which employs 40 people, with daughters



Stephanie Reeder, general manager, and Staci Lerch Arble, sales manager. Son-in-law Chris Reeder is the webmaster, runs IT for the store and handles marketing, too. It was his idea to partner with Penn State, located in State College just 23 miles west, to help boost the Lerch RV brand.

"Being in a relatively rural area and not part of a chain, it's sort of how we identify and brand ourselves. We're an official sponsor of Penn State football," Lerch says. "I think it adds a sense of familiarity with a lot of our customers. They say, 'You're the Penn State dealership.'"

Reeder also has updated the store's pine trees logo by adding a fox, Ed Lerch's high school nickname. A corporate motto has even evolved from the addition; visitors to lerchrv.com and its YouTube and TikTok channels are urged to "Follow the Fox" for better savings and service.

It's a natural progression for a dealership that was one of the first in the region with an 800 number as well as a website, and Lerch says a look at Lerch RV's feedback proves customers are happy.

"We certainly take pride in the fact we have a 4.9 Google rating. We're in it for the long haul. You have to get the customers in the door. You have to do the proper marketing, but in the same sense, you can't give up the character of the dealership for short-term gains, either. It's been interesting to try to navigate that," he says.

Looking forward, Lerch is hopeful, despite recent economic challenges in the country and an unknown future.

"We've got some marketing ideas and some changes coming up that I think will reinvigorate things," he says. "Right now, we're at probably the lowest numbers we've had, but it's not by any means indicative of what the future is. We've got a very good base that we are working with here, we've got an excellent location and employees. We're extremely well-off financially, so we're definitely optimistic about the long haul." RVP

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MAINTAINING *Sway Control* 101

Help customers understand the risk sway presents, how to prevent it and why it matters.

BY MAURA KELLER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BLUE OX



One of the biggest concerns of RV owners is sway control. Whether they are driving a lightweight trailer, a toy hauler or even a small passenger vehicle, sway control and prevention is top of mind for novice and experienced drivers alike.

As Kevin Molland, director of marketing at Blue Ox, explains, sway control and prevention are paramount for ensuring the safety and stability of any towing setup. These systems are designed to maintain the alignment of a trailer with the towing vehicle, preventing the hazardous swaying that can lead to serious accidents, especially in high winds, on uneven roads or when overtaking large vehicles.

"By mitigating trailer sway, sway control hitches and devices can provide a smoother ride, enhancing the overall stability and control for the driver," Molland says. "Additionally, reducing sway minimizes the excessive strain on both







Kevin Molland,
Blue Ox director of marketing

the towing vehicle and the trailer, leading to less wear and tear and prolonging the life span of a customer's equipment. Thus, investing in quality sway control systems is not just a matter of comfort but a critical safety measure for all RV enthusiasts."

Blue Ox's parent company, Automatic Equipment Manufacturing, has been around since 1925. With the acquisition of Blue Ox in 1991, the company established a name for itself as a manufacturer of towing products, including weight-distributing hitches, sway control, tow bars and baseplates. Now both Automatic Equipment Manufacturing and Blue Ox are subsidiaries of Hesse Enterprises Company, with Blue Ox's approach to towing being influenced by its heritage as a fourth-generation family-owned business.

"Embodying 99 years of craftsmanship on the family farm in Nebraska, where it all began, our robust towing equipment promises enduring reliability on the road," Molland says. With such a long history, Blue Ox Towing has a wealth of experience dealing with sway prevention and control issues facing customers.

Sway & Different RV Types

So, from Blue Ox's experience, what types of RVs present the greatest risk of sway issues? First, travel trailers are among the most common RVs that experience sway problems. According to Molland, a travel trailer's boxy shape and high profile can catch more wind, and improper weight distribution can exacerbate sway.

"Also, lightweight trailers, which are often marketed for their ease of towing, can be more susceptible to sway due to their lighter weight," Molland adds. "This can make them more reactive to crosswinds and passing vehicles."

Toy haulers, which are designed to carry heavy loads like ATVs and motorcycles, can also experience sway issues. If the load is not balanced correctly, it can significantly increase the risk of sway.

"Compared to double-axle trailers, single-axle trailers are also generally less stable, making them more prone to swaying," Molland says.

And while the type of RV often dictates sway potential, so too do other factors, including improper loading and not knowing the gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of the towing vehicle and trailer, and other load-related factors.

As Molland explains, correctly loading an RV is crucial for stability; this involves distributing weight evenly, ensuring heavier items are placed low and centered, and avoiding excessive weight at the rear.

"Exceeding the GVWR of either the towing vehicle or the trailer can lead to instability and increased sway risk," Molland says. Additionally, understanding the gross combined weight rating (GCWR), which includes the loaded vehicle's and



trailer's total weight, is essential for safe towing. Regular maintenance of the towing equipment, including tires, brakes and hitch components, also plays a significant role in maintaining sway control and overall towing safety.

How Dealers Can Help

As such, RV dealers can play a vital role in helping their customers with sway control and prevention.

Molland recommends dealers explain the importance of an adequately matched towing vehicle and trailer, ensuring that the GVWR and GCWR are not exceeded. Dealers should also emphasize the significance of proper weight distribution, with heavier items placed low and centered, and dealers should caution against overloading the rear of the trailer.

"Also introduce the various sway control devices available, such as weight distribution hitches with integrated sway control, which helps maintain stability and reduce sway during travel. Additionally, advise customers to regularly check and maintain their towing equipment, including tires, brakes and hitch components, to ensure safe and stable towing experiences," Molland says.

It is also imperative that dealers thoroughly explain the inherent dangers and potential risks involved when not having sway control.

"Without proper sway control, trailers are more susceptible to dangerous swaying, especially in high winds, on uneven roads or when passing large vehicles," Molland says. "This swaying can lead to a loss of control, increasing the likelihood of accidents."

Additionally, persistent sway places excessive stress on both the towing vehicle and the trailer, leading to accelerated wear and tear and potentially costly repairs.

Identifying Solutions

When a customer brings forward sway control issues to a dealer, there are several solutions available to address the sway control and prevent any future mishaps, each designed to enhance the stability of a towing setup.

Molland says these include friction sway control devices, which use friction pads to dampen sway, and sway prevention systems employing a hitch head working with spring bars that employs caster to constantly center the trailer to the tow vehicle while also distributing trailer weight more evenly. Additionally, weight distribution hitches with integrated sway control combine the benefits of distributing trailer weight more evenly with active sway control, offering a comprehensive solution. Electronic sway control systems are also available, which use sensors and automatic braking to correct sway in real time.

Blue Ox's SwayPro and TrackPro use a computer-designed hitch head that, in combination with the spring steel sway bars, provides caster similar to the steering in your car or pickup that automatically returns the vehicle to center when coming out of a turn. In this case, the trailer is automatically returned to the center of the tow vehicle when the trailer is pushed off center by wind or rough roads. SwayPro's system uses a chain and rotating latch system. When utilized properly with spring bars, it augments the suspension of the tow vehicle, significantly reducing the noise caused by most friction hitches. TrackPro's spring steel bars work with friction and steel brackets to eliminate sway.

"Blue Ox suggests [that] dealers need to emphasize that investing in sway control devices enhances safety by maintaining stability," Molland says. "It also helps protect a consumer's investment by reducing mechanical strain and extending the life span of their equipment." RVP



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THE RISE OF OFF-GRID RVING



Winnebago Revel

Why RVers are seeking **adventurous terrain** more than ever, and how manufacturers are responding.

ARTICLE & PHOTOS BY SCOTT RUSSELL

When you hear the word overlanding, do you immediately think of RV travel in countries like Australia? While off-road RVing may not have its roots here in the United States, its popularity is surging among American travelers who seek increased freedom and choices regarding where to camp or explore. Understanding why this style of RVing is taking off and exploring how RV manufacturers are creating models to take advantage of this trend is key for staying in-the-know and relevant in today's market.

Behind the Popularity of Off-Road RVing

It's no secret that camping in the U.S. has dramatically changed in the years following 2020. In the last few years, we have seen surges in all age groups of travelers deciding to embrace a new type of adventure for their vacation time: the great outdoors. Travelers seek solitude and a more relaxing trip than the typical flight and hotel travel arrangements. Travelers have flocked to RVing in droves.

While it's incredible to see more people embracing the outdoors and RVing, this has created quite a few challenges within the existing RV travel infrastructure. Campground availability has become more limited, especially in peak seasons and near natural and tourist attractions. While the most popular spots were already tough to snag prior to this increase of new RVers, now even less popular camping areas often require reserving further in advance.

The supply of new campsites has yet to catch up with the increase in camper demand. This has resulted in a lack of availability and significantly increased the price of overnight camping.

I can still remember the first few years as a full-time RVing family beginning in 2015. We laugh about this now, but it was a huge deal if we spent even $40 a night at campgrounds. We also often changed plans at the last minute. If we loved a campground or a location, we simply chose to extend the reservation and easily bump all our other plans to future dates. Or if the weather wasn't exactly what we wanted, we changed routes. It was pure freedom — and it was terrific.

You don't need me to tell you that

this differs from RVing today. However, there are still ways to have this type of traveling freedom in an RV.

RVers are navigating these new challenges by taking their adventures off-road and off-grid. While campgrounds are more crowded, there are still plenty of options to camp on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land and in national forests. RVers today are looking for the freedom to camp anywhere they wish. Choosing an RV with off-road suspension and solar power opens the door to camping for free in nature or even camping without hookups in national parks or at privately owned businesses like wineries and farms. Off-road RVs are restoring the freedom and affordability of RVing.

Technology Makes Off-Road RVing More Appealing

Aren't RVers worried about losing the comfort features of traditional RV models and staying in campgrounds with utility hookups? There is a broad range of amenities available across off-road options. From simple pop-ups to traditional full-size overland vehicles, amenities are available to suit any RVer's comfort needs while off-road traveling.

Tech advancements and the increased availability of solar power have revolutionized how campers spend time off-grid. Gone are the days of solely relying on noisy generator power and worrying about generator hour restrictions. Off-grid RVers can choose models with full solar or upgrade to this option to power their adventures. Portable, suitcase-style solar panels are also an option.

Internet advances have also allowed more travelers than ever to head to previously unconnected locations while still staying in touch. While it's always nice to unplug when getting out in nature, connection options such as Starlink satellite internet allow people to work in even the most remote RVing locations.

Types of Off-Road RVs

RV manufacturers are taking notice and integrating off-road suspension and other off-grid features into many new



ATC Plā

RV models. Off-road RVing isn't limited to overlanders anymore. However, traditional overlanders such as Storyteller Overland's GXV HILT Adventure Truck also exist in the U.S. market. Today, in off-road models, you can find everything from teardrop travel trailers, such as the nuCamp TAG, to Class C motorhomes such as the Winnebago EKKO. Some brands embrace a rugged tactical look throughout their off-road models, such as Encore RV's ROG Survival Series. Other off-road RVs, like the new Entegra Condor, maintain a sleeker, more modern look.

The most common types of off-road RVs in the U.S. today are travel trailers and Class B camper vans. Let's take a closer look at some of the off-road RV models that caught our eye at the Florida RV Show earlier this year.

Notable Off-Road Travel Trailers

While Lance Camper has long been known for its popular truck campers, they launched into the U.S. off-road RV market with the Enduro overlanding travel trailer. This adventure trailer embraces a tactical design both inside and outside. Despite its rugged appearance, the Enduro offers comfort features RVers seek regardless of where they are adventuring. An onboard wet bath, a U-shaped dinette and a large exterior gear storage locker provide a hub for outdoor explorations. At 12 feet and 3,500 pounds, the compact size of the Enduro has a broad customer appeal.

The Winnebago Hike is an off-road travel trailer similar in size and feel to the Enduro. It has a less rugged exterior



Lance Camper Enduro

appearance and a sleek, modern interior. This off-road model features a wet bath, it offers more sleeping configurations, such as a Murphy bed, loft bed or bunk bed, depending on the model. A rear entry door for effortless loading of gear and bikes differentiates this model.

The inTech O-V-R Navigate off-road travel trailer is the most striking example of a rugged exterior appearance and sleek interior. This adventure trailer is built for action with an all-aluminum, fully welded cage frame and diamond-plated exterior skirting. When you walk inside, however, the feeling immediately switches to a modern European-style spacious living interior. It's a standout in the off-road space.

RVers with larger gear storage needs are a perfect match for off-road toy haulers. ATC stands out in this category



nuCamp TAG


InTech O-V-R Navigate's off-road tires

with its all-aluminum construction and modular living space configurations that quickly adapt from comfortable interior living designs to a garage space for travel days. The ATC Plā 450 2011 features a separate front bunk room popular with families. The configurable furniture track system allows RVers to add and remove pieces to create the garage space required for gear.

Ember's Overland 240TKR is a new off-road toy hauler offering. This rugged adventure toy hauler also offers configurable furniture and living spaces via the EmberTrack system. Possible configurations include adding or removing bunk beds, a desk or a bar to create custom living spaces. The most notable feature is a new convertible Murphy bed. The innovative split bed is on a rail system that allows you to create two separate twin beds or one large king to accommodate various traveler sleeping arrangements.

The smallest adventure travel trailers are among the teardrop models. A great example is nuCamp's TAG travel trailer. For off-road adventurers seeking the basics, a comfortable place to sleep, air conditioning and a large exterior rear hatch kitchen can all be found in this line of teardrops. Lithium batteries and solar upgrades are available for roaming off-grid.

Rugged Camper Vans

Camper vans are also going where they have never gone before in the off-road RV space. Winnebago's Revel, with all-wheel drive and the Winnebago Power Max system, ensures travelers can remain off-grid for up to seven days.

Storyteller Overland's Beast Mode is packed with interior comfort features and the freedom to go anywhere. It also features all-wheel drive with a self-charging battery that replenishes itself once it drops below 25%. Got gear? The Beast Mode provides 103 cubic feet of rear storage for bikes and equipment.

Adventurous Class Cs

Class Cs aren't missing out on the off-road scene. Entegra recently debuted the rugged Condor motorhome to escort adventurers anywhere they wish to go in comfort. The Condor is ready for action, equipped with an all-wheel-drive chassis, a front and rear lift kit, an E-Z Drive handling package, helper springs and a rear stabilizer bar. The interior looks anything but rugged with sleek European styling and a comfortable split twin or convertible king bed.

The Winnebago EKKO is off-road capable, with all-wheel-drive, 455 watts of solar power and a 50-gallon freshwater tank. One of the EKKO's standout features is the oversized rear pass-through gear garage, which is perfect for bikes. This family-friendly model includes dinette seating with three-point seat belts and child seat tether anchors. The EKKO also offers an optional pop-top roof tent for additional sleeping areas.

Off-road RVing in the U.S. is experiencing a significant rise in popularity as travelers seek greater freedom and the ability to explore more remote areas. RV manufacturers have responded to the demand by offering a diverse range of off-road capable models, from rugged travel trailers to luxurious Class Cs, all designed to meet the needs of adventurers who wish to venture beyond the beaten path.

The off-road RVing trend is not only reshaping the future of travel but also reviving the spirit of freedom and adventure that is at the heart of the American camping road trip experience. RVP

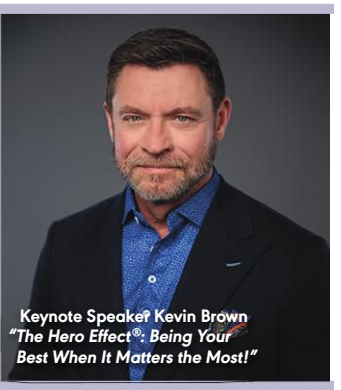
Scott Russell and his wife, Vanessa, have been full-time RVers with their daughter since 2015. They work from the road as freelance social media influencers/content creators for RV manufacturers, RV dealerships, campgrounds and outdoor brands. They are also full-time freelance RV travel writers for RV magazines and websites. Contact them at scott@theadventuredetour.com, on their blog theadventuredetour.com, or on Instagram @theadventuredetour.





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- Labor Law – Overtime, Injury, and Illness Rules, Plus Worker Classification
- Dealer Data and Digital Issues

Fixed Operations *(Parts, Warranty & Service)*

- What are the Strategies and Tactics Top Performing Service Departments Employ to Improve RECT?
- Effective Practices to Elevate Service to Industry-leading Standards
- Management Strategies to Expand Service Facilities/Capacity
- Parts & Accessories – Winning Strategies for Competing with Internet-based Companies
- Innovative Training and Retention Practices

Digital Marketing/BDC/Social Media

- Working with Social Media Influencers
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- Reputation Management

Business Innovation *(Sales & F&I)*

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CREATING A CAMPSITE COMMUNITY

How these Storyteller Overland owners fostered a sense of belonging among van-lifers.

BY JAVACIA HARRIS BOWSER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PETER ESPARZA AND EVELYN MENDOZA





When Peter Esparza and Evelyn Mendoza purchased a Storyteller Overland Classic MODE camper van in August 2022, they had no idea that the adventures awaiting them would go far beyond exploring the great outdoors. After buying the vehicle, they were quickly introduced to the Storyteller community.

"The friends that we've made in this community so far, they've become family to us," Mendoza says. "And it's not something we thought of originally when we purchased our van, but it's been a beautiful thing."

Building community, however, has always been a top priority for the team at Storyteller Overland.

"When you buy a Storyteller, you also buy into a community of over 2,000 friends that you get automatically," says Summer Rogers, chief communications officer for Storyteller Overland. "We don't just build a van and say, 'Go have fun.' Well, we do, but we also say, 'Come back to us and be our friend.'"

To foster those friendships, Storyteller Overland manages Facebook groups where current and aspiring Storyteller owners can connect. The groups are much more than a place to ask questions about recreational vehicles. These online communities give members a platform to share their adventures, post pictures and even chat about their pets or what they like to cook when camping out. The largest Storyteller Overland Facebook group boasts more than 8,000 members.

But the Storyteller community is thriving IRL, too. Members use the Facebook groups to plan meetups, campouts and other events — many of which Storyteller Overland will support in some way. Some Storyteller owners have started subgroups based on geographic area. Esparza and Mendoza, who are based in the Bay Area of San Francisco, launched a group for Storyteller owners in northern California.

"It wasn't a planned leadership," Esparza says. But after seeing that he and Mendoza had a knack for making others feel welcomed at expos and campouts, members of the Storyteller community urged them to start hosting events of their own. "It's like the community picked us," Mendoza says.

The Story Begins

Storyteller Overland was founded about





Peter Esparza and Evelyn Mendoza organize meetups and campouts for the Storyteller community, including themed events like Vansgiving.

five and a half years ago in Birmingham, Alabama, by Jeffrey Hunter, who currently serves as CEO, with the help of co-founders Lee Conn (chief operations officer) and Andrew Cooley (chief revenue officer).

The story behind how the company got its name is quite ironic. It was inspired by the phrase "Shut your storyteller!" But being silent is the last thing the team at Storyteller Overland wants people to do.

"We want to give people the way to get to telling their stories and a way to those adventures where their stories will then be generated," Rogers says.

They hope to do this by offering top-of-the-line camper vans and adventure trucks, but the Storyteller community also gives people a chance to make and share stories.

"They are so interconnected, and they take care of each other," Rogers says of Storyteller owners. "It's amazing."

Rogers, who began her career in 2014 at Mercedes-Benz U.S. International in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, joined the Storyteller Overland team in 2022. After excelling as chief of staff, she was promoted to chief communications officer the following year. It's her job to build connections and enhance engagement among the company's employees who live across the United States, Storyteller owners and the community at large.

"I was already in the automotive manufacturing world, but then I found out about Storyteller and just how much this company cares about its employees and how much they care about the people that we serve," Rogers says. "The decisions that we make here are with people in mind, no matter if we're making an internal decision or something that's external or something that's going to affect our dealers. That's what I love so much about this place. It is so people-centric."

Good Vibes Only

It all started with a sign. After buying their Storyteller vehicle in August 2022, Esparza and Mendoza attended an adventure van expo near Lake Tahoe the next month. Once they were all set up,

they fired up a neon sign that simply read "Good Vibes."

Since that's also one of the mantras of Storyteller Overland, Esparza and Mendoza believe that's what attracted other Storyteller owners to their van. An impromptu hangout emerged.

"We're able to bring people together from all walks of life and all ages," Mendoza says.

Mendoza, 33, and Esparza, 36, are usually the youngest owners at various events. But that doesn't keep them from leading the way to cultivating camaraderie.

"There's a lot of introverted people, but somehow we are able to make them feel comfortable," Mendoza says.

When Esparza and Mendoza say all are welcome, they mean it. At expos, you're likely to find them inviting anyone to come hang out, whether they own a Storyteller vehicle or not. They even invite vendors to come join the fun.

"We know what it feels like to not be included," Mendoza says. She and Esparza say they both sometimes feel different from their other friends and family. "We joke around that we're the misfits, and the people [who] hang out with us, they also joke around about being the misfits."

Their hospitality started small with



> **"When you buy a Storyteller, you also buy into a community of over 2,000 friends that you get automatically."**

Esparza setting up whiskey tastings while Mendoza whipped up cute cocktails and prickly pear lemonade for those looking for nonalcoholic options. Their bar was dubbed the "Good Vibes Bar."

Later they'd host tiki-themed nights, and everyone looked forward to Esparza smoking meats to nosh on.

Eventually Esparza and Mendoza launched a Storyteller community for those based in northern California and began to host events of their own. They now organize their own meetups and campouts and themed events like Vansgiving.

"I smoked some ham, a friend of mine deep-fried a turkey and we just had a giant potluck around Thanksgiving," Esparza says.

Mendoza adds, "What better way to bond with people than over food, as well as being out in the outdoors."

Despite their "good vibes" attitude, the members of the Storyteller community are ready to support one another through the bad times, too.

When a member was diagnosed with cancer, the group rallied around him. Esparza and Mendoza organized a lunch so local members could wish him well before surgery. Esparza even took him on a last-minute camping trip.

"We really are straight up family," Esparza reiterates.

Heart & SOUL

The team at Storyteller Overland wants community members not only to find adventures across the country but also leave each place they visit better. That's why they launched the SOUL Program, which stands for Storyteller Outreach Uplift and Love. Community members are encouraged to find ways to invest in the communities around them.

"It's really just about pouring back the blessings that we've received," Rogers says.

For this year's Vansgiving, Esparza and Mendoza will encourage campers to bring canned foods, which they'll donate to a local charity. They're also planning a December campout called Deck the Vans. With Storyteller Overland sponsoring the campsite, admission will be toys that will be donated to a local Toys for Tots program. Storyteller Overland hopes to organize other projects such as trail cleanups.

As Storyteller Overland continues to grow, the company never wants to lose its focus on cultivating community. They will continue to support the owner-organized events as much as possible and seek to foster friendships.

When the owners of the first HILT models that Storyteller sold came to pick up their vehicles, they instantly connected.

"We've heard they're planning a 10-day trip together in Colorado," Rogers shares. "That makes all of our little hearts just want to explode!"

Because the team at Storyteller Overland believes that storytelling helps build community, they're also launching a newsletter that will do more than offer company updates and tips and tricks for maintaining the vehicles, but will also give owners another platform to share their adventures.

Esparza and Mendoza will keep doing their part, too. They're already working on a joint event with a Storyteller community based in the Pacific Northwest.

"Life is short, and there's so many things that are going on in the world, so many things going on in people's own lives, and what we love about van life and the Storyteller community is we're able to put that on the back burner and enjoy ourselves," Mendoza says. "It's just a really great community that we never thought we would have." RVP

GOING FULL TILT TO THE HILT

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STORYTELLER OVERLAND



"Generally speaking, a howling wilderness does not howl: it is the imagination of the traveler that does the howling."
—Henry David Thoreau

The imagination of serious adventure seekers was certainly at full tilt when the team at Storyteller Overland dreamed up the GXV HILT.

The HILT adventure truck was revealed in 2023 after years of development and testing and has been rolling over tough terrain with style and ease ever since. With a modern, elevated interior stocked with all the amenities any camper could possibly want, the HILT is primed for off-road and off-grid adventures in the wild.

The feature list makes the HILT adventure truck thrive in rugged environments and also allows for luxurious travel, including its:

- Carbon fiber and Kevlar reinforced vacuum-infused resin composite capsule
- RAM 5500 chassis 6.7L Cummins Turbo Diesel
- 16.8 kWh M-Power Battery System with dual 3,000-watt inverters
- Hutchinson true beadlock wheels with 41-inch MPV tires
- LiquidSpring active hydraulic smart suspension
- 2-inch closed-cell foam acoustic and thermal insulation
- Proprietary Zero Torsion Subframe
- 360-degree full spectrum trail lights by KC HiLiTES
- Flarespace nVader rear racks and storage system
- A 20,000-pound winch

The cab has seating and shoulder belts for four and there are two queen beds for sleeping in the capsule. The Zero Torsion Subframe system allows independent movement of the capsule from the chassis and reduces overall stress and improves off-road traction.



The LiquidSpring smart suspension system evaluates speed, steering, braking and road inputs 1,000 times per second and adjusts for extremes.

While the HILT is without a doubt a capable adventure truck, it features an interior height of 6 feet, 7 inches and a 15,000 Btu air conditioner — creating creature comforts every camper wants. The wet bath height is 6 feet, 5 inches and includes a shower, sink, flushable cassette toilet, mirror, dry storage and retractable clothesline.

The kitchen's stainless steel 6.9-cubic-foot fridge and freezer, dual burner induction cooktop, and microwave/air fryer/convention oven appeals to any chef. Also included are a Guzzle H20 water purification system, seven drawers, a pull-out trash bin, a 7-cubic-foot closet with hanging rod and foldaway shelves. The dinette seats four to five adults and converts into a queen bed.

The loft queen bed has bin storage, 12-volt USBs, 110-volt outlets and wireless charging stations.

Safety-wise, the HILT comes with a smoke/carbon monoxide detector, fire extinguisher, ground fault circuit interrupter and a locking toilet cassette door.

"We are always listening carefully to Storyteller's amazing community of adventurers and road trippers, some of whom want to go farther and stay out there longer with more people than a van can traditionally accommodate, so we spent two years designing, engineering, and testing the HILT to not only perform in off-road and off-grid environments, but also in extreme comfort and efficiency," says Lee Conn, Storyteller Overland's co-founder and COO. "It's an absolute blast to travel in."

The HILT is priced at $446,322.

— Jennifer King RVP

A THRONE WITH A VIEW

CompoCloset's composting toilet offers a chemical-free waste management solution for off-grid and beyond.

BY DARIAN ARMER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF COMPOCLOSET



It's often the least favorite part of camping. It stinks. It's hard to get rid of without a sewer connection. It's awkward.

It's sh*t.

But Richard Peter has made sh*t his business.

It all started when the Europe/Australia-based entrepreneur and his life partner, Angela, decided to take some time off and travel in a van. They quit their jobs and dropped everything, including their recently renovated house that they rented out, and self-converted their van to hit the road.

"In 2020 he went from banking in London to building out his van on his parent's driveway," says Erica Pugh, co-founder and head of marketing of CompoCloset. Pugh is also Angela's twin sister. "My sister said, 'We're not going in this thing without a toilet. And we're not getting a chemical toilet. We're getting a green toilet.'"

So, Peter found a toilet from a now competitor and put it in the van.

"They realized how great these toilets are. Composting toilets in general are really cool, but the competitor was a bit big and bulky and didn't fit well. They had to redesign the van around it. Richard is a tinkerer and started working with it to make it fit better. He ended up designing his own," says Pugh.

Pugh was in the spirits industry, where she did marketing for spirits and cocktail events — but that shut down during the pandemic. Thus, she was doing online marketing but had the capacity to help with CompoCloset.

"Richard and my sister came over here to visit us. We talked and tried to decide if we should try it out. We put up some Facebook ads to see if people would even be interested. We decided to do an Indie campaign and crowdfunded it. We raised more than $300,000. Only the top 5% to 10% of campaigns make that much," Pugh says.

The group decided to start with a contract manufacturer to have the molds made.

"They are rather large injection molds. We reached out to Universal Plastic in California, and they returned our phone call. They continue to make our product," she says.

Pugh says the more they learn about sanitation, the harder they strive to bring these types of toilets to more people at a more affordable cost.

"You save water, you get to stay off the grid longer and you save a lot of time. There are no chemicals, and depending on what you're doing, you can actually engage composting stuff," she says.

CompoCloset was born out of that vision.

Cuddy Cabin

CompoCloset currently offers two composting toilet options: the Cuddy and the Cuddy Lite. Strange names? Not really, Pugh explains.

"The 'Cuddy Cabin' is where you go to the bathroom on a boat. The name first started in the nautical area. The 'head' on the boat is also where you go to the bathroom. The name of our products is a nod to the nautical arena and the history of composting toilets," Pugh says.

CompoCloset products separate your "ones and twos," using a urine diverter that stops the formation of sewage.

"That's the first bit of magic. With the addition of a composting agent, that kick-starts the composting process. We have two units; the original Cuddy has an agitator that fits more people's needs and allows you to stay off-grid longer. The agitator aerates the poo more. It mixes it up and you get more poos for your buck. Out of our unit you get between 20 to 25 poos," she says.

The Cuddy Lite is an agitator-less version of the Cuddy and is for those who want to be able to put a liner bag in the bin for easier cleaning. Some customers simply want to avoid using a composting agent and prefer to empty

the bin after every use. Some like to add composting material after using it rather than stirring up the whole bin. Either way, you're putting waste to good use.

As for a composting medium, Pugh says you need to use sawdust or another layering material, but she mostly recommends using coconut coir, especially for the agitator unit. Coconut coir helps reduce smell, attracts fewer pests and has a neutral pH balance.

"It's a nice brown natural color, is quite absorbent and comes in nice practical bricks. It can be rehydrated. It's easy to take with you instead of a larger bulking agent," she says.

While it may seem like a lot of work, a composting toilet has many benefits over a portable chemical toilet. Portable chemical toilets need to be emptied every few days and waste water. When using a composting toilet, there's no need to use chemicals and wastewater, which wastes more water and energy in the treatment process.

Closing the "Poop Loop"

Despite the benefits of a composting toilet, the smell might be the biggest worry for some customers.

Pugh says the good news is if it's done right, the toilet shouldn't smell like anything except forest floor because the composted material looks and smells earthy. There's no need to externally vent the Cuddy Lite either, since there's an integrated carbon filter to reduce odors.

"We have seen, especially in the U.S., that there are some people who prefer not to deal with the compost but still want a chemical-free toilet. In this case, you can start with a bag in it and layer. You don't get quite as many poos, but this way, they can get rid of it," Pugh says. She admits that composting involves a slight learning curve, and that for compost to be safe and pathogen-free for use, it takes six to 12 months — something you won't have time for with a composting toilet.

"There are no composting toilets on the market that are able to complete the composting process right now," she says. "You end up throwing it away in most cases. We're not trying to greenwash it, and we're looking for ways to close that poop loop. But you're still saving water and not using chemicals."



Everybody Poops

Since everybody poops, almost every market has a need for composting toilets. Especially small, portable ones. Pugh says that right now, their product is in the RV industry, marine industry, tiny homes and more, but van-life is where it all began.

"We do work with dealers and with different builders in the industry. We work with van builders doing custom builds, and we're moving into the truck camper market as well. We've seen a large rise of private users in truck camping. Custom-built truck campers are quite price effective and a lot cheaper than vans. They can be a daily driver and also a camping thing," she says.

The company is interested in working with different partners throughout the U.S., Canada and the United Kingdom.

"We're talking with different RV manufacturers in the U.K., and with them we're looking at making it an option to change out the chemical toilet for a composting one. It's hard to put a composting toilet in standard, but we think being able to offer a swap it in/swap it out option would be great. We have plans for a new one that will be really good for the RV market.

"We think this is the best solution. The devil is in the details, and we've really done the details right. For example, our hinges are articulating so you can mount flush against the wall. We've made it very easy to clean and to use with the idea that certain bodies have issues with urine diversion. We're very body inclusive."

And it doesn't hurt that "it's super cute to look at," Pugh says.

Sustainable & Accessible Sanitation

Pugh says what really differentiates CompoCloset is not necessarily the product itself, but the way their company works for the opportunity for everyone to use sanitation.

"We keep improving. We want to make sure it works for everyone in different applications. That is one of our key things. Our mission statement is, 'Making sanitation more accessible and sustainable to help people along their journeys.'"

Besides their "kick-ass product," Pugh says they have really great customer service with the goal of helping people and building a community.

"We are continuing to iterate and make better toilets. We consider ourselves a research company as well. We're working with a university to make a better composting toilet and close that poop loop. Sanitation is a huge problem. In India alone, there are like 3 billion people who don't have access to safe sanitation. We're trying to address that on an individual level by developing a better toilet to help."

From disaster area toilets with the simplest version of a urine diverter to festival toilets and tiny home living, CompoCloset is determined to make a better toilet, so the world has better access to sanitation.

"Everyone poops and everyone needs toilets. We're just making one that can be better," she says. "We love the conversation and the market research aspect of it. Even if we can't help someone, we can learn more about something and try to address those issues later on." RVP

From a Land Down Under:

AUSSIE INNOVATION MEETS US ADVENTURE

MDC USA's four considerations when heading off-grid nod to its rugged origins in building RVs for extreme overlanding.

BY JAMES FIELD, MDC GENERAL MANAGER – COMMERCIAL & PRODUCT

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MDC

"Our adventures have taken us around and through some of the harshest country on Earth. Australia has it all."



MDC's ISO 9001-certified manufacturing facility in China.

While the name MDC may not be familiar in the U.S. trailer market yet, the brand touts an enviable reputation Down Under for building some of the most capable and well-appointed overlanding pop-up campers and travel trailers on the market.

Founded in Australia in 2005 by Vaughan Hindley, Market Direct Campers (MDC) started off building small tent trailers. Fast-forward nearly 20 years and more than 40,000 units later, MDC now makes a range of over 30 models of full-size and off-grid overlanding travel trailers up to 25 feet in length. The company is also one of Australia's largest industry employers.

With a growing popularity for overlanding in the United States, MDC saw an opportunity to bring its travel trailers and pop-up campers to a new market. The company launched its USA branch in 2021 in Cypress, California, and has since expanded to over 20 outlets and dealerships across 13 states.

"What we realized is that there was a customer need for genuinely tough and reliable trailers to go overlanding in the United States," says Hindley, founder



and owner. “Customers want to be able to escape off-grid with confidence and not worry about the strength or reliability of their travel trailer — MDC USA’s range ticks all the boxes in this regard.”

Making a travel trailer that is truly ready to go off-grid is no easy task, but MDC USA relies on its Down Under experience in the segment. That includes arming its USA models with a lifetime structural and chassis frame warranty, while using Finite Element Analysis (FEA) software to engineer and analyze its chassis elements and trailing arm suspension precision.

MDC USA credits its off-grid success to an “onslaught” of research and development that utilizes its whole team — management, sales, admin and manufacturing — to improve its rigs.



MDC USA models come with a lifetime structural and chassis frame warranty.


Founder Vaughan Hindley (third from left) gets out with the MDC team to test products in Moab, Utah.

“Our adventures have taken us around and through some of the harshest country on Earth. Australia has it all,” the company says about its R&D. “All our research and development [is] well-published in most forms of media. TV and social media have played a big part in this success. Social media has kept us in touch with our ever-growing customer base. This gives us the best up-to-date testing available from any source.”

MDC USA uses its social platforms to educate consumers as well — some first-time U.S. overlanders. With 77-plus videos on its YouTube channel, the company’s weekly “MDC Masterclass” taps its Customer Advocate Steve Zammit for tutorials on DIY trailer maintenance, problem-solving and operations. The company also runs its “The Real Owners” video series to hear feedback and testimonials from MDC campers.

4 Things To Consider When Heading Off-Grid

MDC has held its exclusive partnership with its ISO 9001-certified partner manufacturing facility in China for over 10 years.

“MDC’s model range in Australia and the U.S. has become the industry



The team on a test trip in Swing Arm City near Caineville, Utah.



MDC USA's signature external kitchen makes off-grid meals easy.

benchmark in quality, durability and presentation, thanks to a highly skilled workforce coupled with cutting-edge automation and advanced manufacturing techniques," the company says.

When heading off-grid in a travel trailer or pop-up camper, MDC considers four key elements:

1. Power generation and storage
2. Water storage and capacity
3. Food storage and preparation
4. Temperature control

First and foremost is the ability to generate power, followed by the subsequent ability to store it. The company's USA range comes with up to 700 watts of rooftop solar that quickly boosts an onboard LiFePRO+ 200AH lithium iron phosphate battery. A 2,000-watt pure sinewave inverter then powers up the rig's 110-volt receptacles to run all its creature comforts off-grid. Two propane tanks are stowed at the front of all MDC USA models to provide fuel and power for air, water heating and cooking.

The second element to consider when off-grid is water storage capacity. Some of the MDC USA travel trailer range are fitted with over 60 gallons of freshwater tank capacity and over 20 gallons of gray water storage — plenty of water to wash up and take a hot shower, powered by a Truma AquaGo water heater.

Food storage and preparation is the third key element for off-grid travel.



Having the ability to keep food cold or frozen for long periods is critical. That's why select MDC USA travel trailer models come standard with Norcold 12-volt internal fridges, in addition to having an external 12-volt portable cooler slide for more cold storage capacity.

On the other hand, food preparation and cooking is made easy across the USA range with MDC's signature external slideout kitchens — complete with a Thetford cooktop, sink with hot and cold water, drying racks and storage drawers.

In its larger travel trailer models, units also come with full internal kitchens to give campers flexibility and convenience to cook inside during inclement weather.

The fourth element to consider is temperature control. When traveling off-grid, having the ability to control the rig's temperature to escape comfortably in cold and hot climates is key year-round. For those cold winter nights, select models in the MDC USA travel trailer range come standard with propane-powered Dometic furnaces. The line's cold weather package also includes water tank heating pads, HWS antifreeze kits and a LiFePRO+ lithium battery with integrated self-heating. During hot summer days, the range boasts 12-volt fans to cool down quickly.

Eyes on Adventure

"What sets MDC USA apart is our dedication to innovation and quality, backed by our commitment to ongoing and rigorous real-world testing of our products," says Hindley. "All these off-grid features are standard inclusions with MDC as we understand how important it is to be well-prepared. We also only use quality appliances from trusted brands such as Truma, Dometic, Thetford, Cruisemaster, Norcold and Furrion to ensure our customers can escape with confidence."

The company also touts a quick turnaround on its units.

"We have one of the fastest turnaround rates in the industry. In most cases, we can have your camper trailer ready to tow away when you are, and not weeks or even months," it says.

When it comes to delivery across the U.S., MDC's ability to build and send its campers to nearly anywhere in the country also offers customers the option to organize their own freight if desired. Service-wise, MDC operates through three locations in California, Arizona and Utah, paired with an extensive authorized repairer network.

Always evolving and listening to its strong customer base, MDC USA says it's set to reveal a brand-new model series later this year at the RV Dealers Association (RVDA)'s Convention/Expo in Las Vegas.

The model will be the "best U.S model series yet, boasting eye-watering off-grid capabilities coupled with unrivaled functionality and luxury," the company says. RVP

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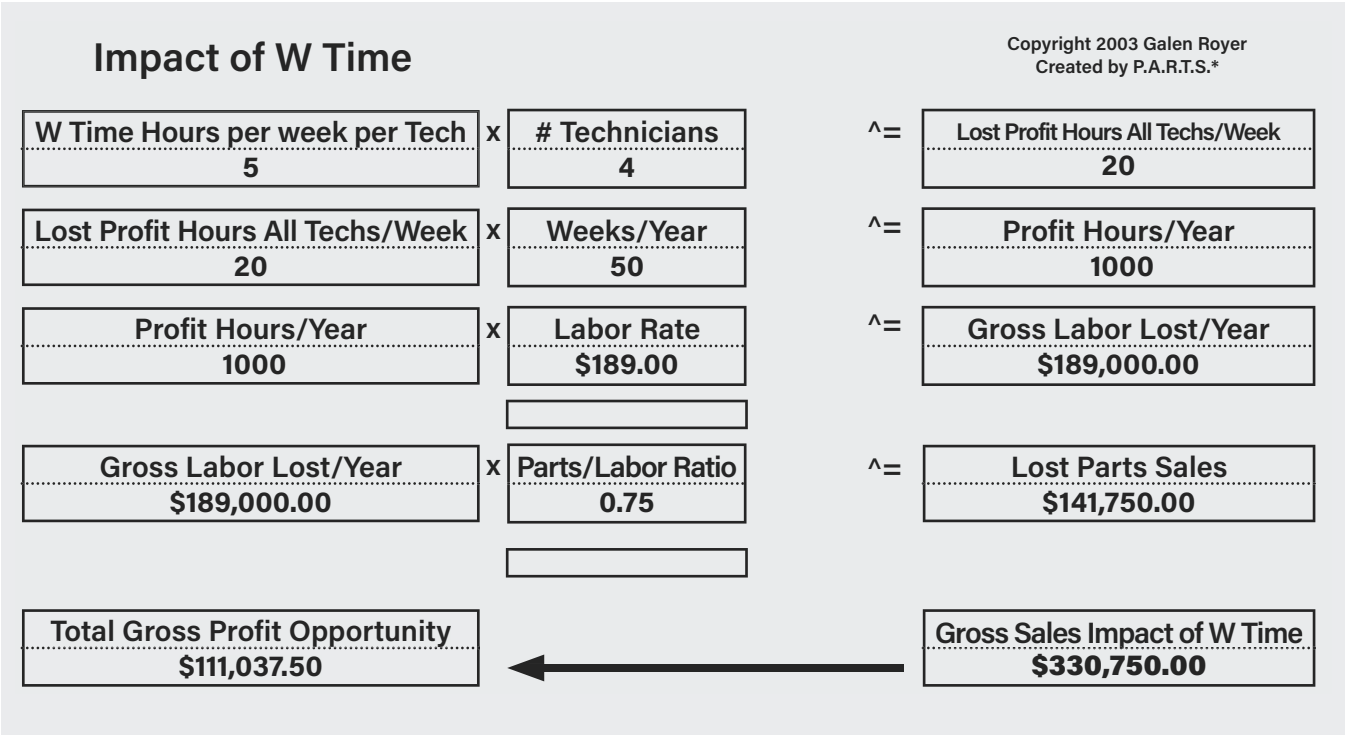
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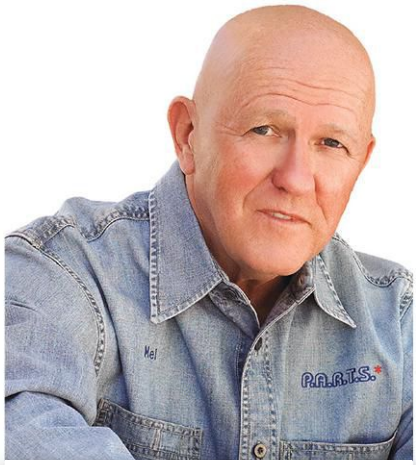
RECTifying Your Operations, Part 2

How collaboration between parts associates and service technicians can benefit your customers and your dealership's efficiency.

Editor's note: This is the second part of a series highlighting repair event cycle time (RECT). Part I appeared in the July 2024 issue of RV PRO magazine. In the first installment of this series, we looked at one side of our six-sided box. I suggested that you review at least one of your fixed ops processes, specifically your service special tool control policies and procedures. Perhaps I tempted you to use the research into this process to determine if you could reduce your RECT by modifying your detailed written procedure (DWP) for this process. If you have done this, I hope your efforts were rewarded by identifying opportunities to reduce your RECT.

Whether you have realized ways to reduce your repair event cycle time (RECT) or not, I suggest that you continue reading this month's column, which will look at two more sides of our idea box which are:

- Service Tech Parts Associate (STPA) — which is a parts associate dedicated to support the technicians.
- The Tech Walk — a review of possible steps taken by a technician in the acceptance of, processing of and completion of a work order; a tool to evaluate the costs related to a technician's time while walking during the work order process.



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.

The Second Side — STPA

In the latter part of my parts manager/director career, I was fortunate to be hired at a dealership that incorporated a portion of the STPA position. There was one parts associate assigned to research, determine price and availability, and issue parts, accessories and materials to the technicians. This associate worked at a designated workstation to which only service personnel had access. This reduced technician wasted time, or W-Time, which reduced overall RECT.

I realized the benefits of this position not only to the service department but also to the parts department and eventually to the customers. I decided that we could benefit even more if we added responsibilities to the position, which were:

- Communicate with the service person who dispatched the work so that the research and procurement aspects of the position could be done in advance whenever possible; this communication with the dispatcher** was scheduled to be performed at least every two hours for the current and next day's jobs.
  ***This might not be a specific person; it could be the service manager, service adviser or other nontechnical person familiar with the workflow and each technician's skills.*
- Communicate with the dispatcher to determine when a job was to be issued to the technician so that any prepulled goods could be delivered to the technician's workstation, which minimized some of the technician's walking, during which no income was being generated.
- Communicate with the technician when delivering the goods regarding what else might be required, which enabled the STPA to research these items without having the technician stop their work to do this — and communicating with other technicians to determine their additional needs during this delivery cycle.

Perhaps you noticed that each of the STPA tasks involved communication. This introduces another variation on RECT — Routinely Efficient Communication Techniques. By improving this RECT, you have an opportunity to reduce the RECT.

At this point, some of you might be asking how I expect you to justify this extra position. Depending on the number of technicians in your shop and the average duration of a job, this could be performed by any of your parts associates on an as-needed basis — assuming the communications I have suggested are efficiently processed. Or you could calculate the income opportunities that exist by reducing the unnecessary steps that your technicians are taking each shift, which could justify a dedicated STPA. Which is the third side of our box: The Tech Walk.

The Third Side: The Tech Walk & Related W-Time

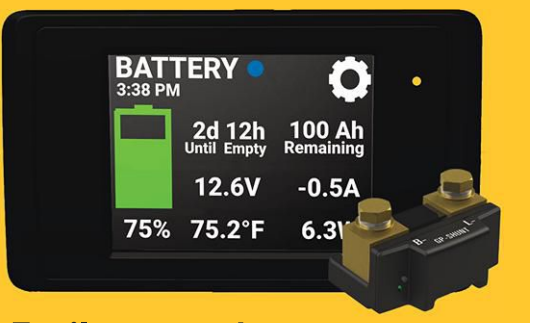
Each of your shops are different in regard to their size, the number of techs, the distance from the farthest tech bay to the parts department and other factors, so

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I am going to make some assumptions, which are:

- The service bays are in the same building as the parts department and the service adviser(s) workstation(s)
- There are four technicians each with a separate work bay
- The tech walking the farthest from the service adviser workstation and the parts department has a 125-foot one-way walk

Please increase or decrease these factors based on your RV business.

In our Tech Walk scenario, there are eight possible paths that the technician might have to take before starting the work order. Some may seem unrealistic; however, if you observe your technicians on a routine day, I think you might be surprised at the W-Time accumulated.

1. Tech walks to the service adviser/dispatcher to get the work order and reviews requested work.
2. Tech walks to the lot to retrieve the unit and answers an employee's question.
3. Tech walks to retrieve the unit, but the key isn't in it so the tech walks back to the service adviser.
4. Tech gets the unit and drives it to the work bay.
5. Tech walks to the parts department to get parts, stock and/or a special order and any other needed materials.
6. Tech carries parts/materials to the bay and gets stopped by another tech who has a question about a work order.
7. Tech continues to the work bay.
8. Tech realizes a special tool is required and walks to the special tool storage area and then returns to the work bay.

And this is just to get the technician started on the work order.

In your RV business, other people may perform these trips, such as a lot porter who might deliver the RV to the tech's bay. This is a good example of having support personnel reduce these trips. However, many of these trips are taken by your technician, who isn't earning you any income during these walks. So consider that an STPA could be doing a lot of these support tasks.

I have provided an example of how much these walks could be costing you (see chart on page 46). The data I used is for example only. If you would like a copy of the Excel tool that I used for this example, please contact me via email.

My assumption is that each of the technicians in the example only expends one hour of W-Time per workday, making it is easy to justify the expense of an STPA. Add the benefit that by reducing the W-Time for each technician, it opens more time available that you can sell. This could improve your customer service by providing a greater opportunity for a customer to have their RV serviced when they want it. And if each technician is more efficient, then maybe you don't need as many technicians.

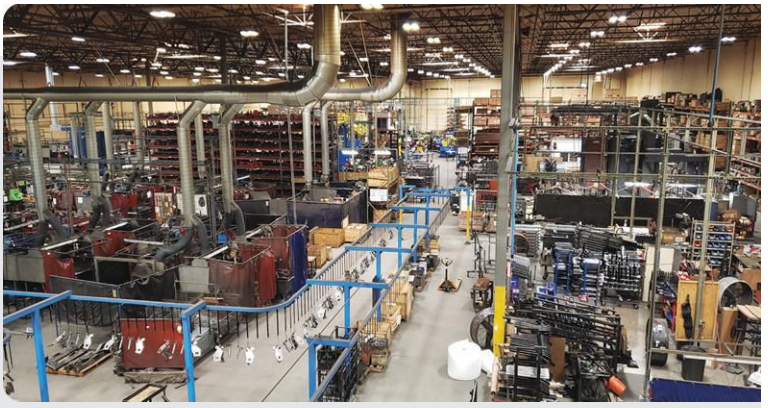
Perhaps I have piqued your interest enough to consider either or both of these sides of the idea box. In the September issue, I will offer two more sides outside of the box to reduce your RECT. RVP

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The Importance of **Follow-Through in Sales**

6 steps dealers can use to help a customer trust that you will do what you say.

There are many steps that need to happen correctly for salespeople to close a deal with customers when the weather is favorable, the right product is in the lot and the economic conditions are strong. However, the aftereffects of COVID created additional issues like high interest rates, a great deal of leftover inventory and salesperson turnover that dealerships are now grappling with.

In my latest book titled "No Trust, No Sale" (available on most online booksellers' websites), I wrote extensively about how building trust with customers is the one critical component that must be maintained throughout any customer interaction, or the chance of closing a sale will dramatically decrease.

There are many things that can contribute to building trust with customers, but there is one very important thing that can just as quickly ruin the comfort level customers must feel to take their credit card out for the down payment: Poor follow-through.

I have seen so many salespeople over the years who had most of the key components to be successful in sales, but lacked the ability, the initiative and/or the commitment to have great follow-through with their customers. There are some weaknesses salespeople can get past with their customers, but a lack of



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follow-through isn't one of them.

What is great follow-through? Simply put, it's doing what you said you were going to do, when you said you were going to do it. It sounds so simple yet is so hard for some salespeople. As you read this, I ask you to look at yourself in the mirror and ask: How is my follow-through?

With customers, there is no middle ground in how they perceive follow-through. It's either great or it's horrible. It's an "on/off" switch. You either have it or you don't — and if you don't, you need to get to work now to implement steps to improve your follow-through. If not, it will continue to be the biggest obstacle to building trust with your customers. If there is no follow-through, there will be no trust, and when there is no trust, customers will internally ask themselves many questions about their salesperson:

- Are they going to try to sell me the wrong thing?
- Are they going to try to sell me something we can't afford?
- Are they going to try to sell me something the sales manager wants to move off the lot?
- Will they be dishonest with me just to get a sale?

Many years ago, a well-known neuroscientist and respected author named Antonio Damasio did research that led him to the conclusion that we are "not thinking machines that feel ... we are feeling machines that think." Trusting someone else (like a salesperson) is a feeling, and much of that conclusion will come from great (or horrible) follow-through.

Here's something else to consider: human nature being what it is, a salesperson can do a great job following up six or seven times in a row, but forget to follow up just one time and the customer will begin to question their commitment, their word and maybe even their honesty.

It's a short rope we all have with customers, and once it's gone, it's not coming back.

Here are a few simple steps to ensure great follow-through with customers.

1. If you don't know the answer, say you don't know the answer.

One of the biggest issues that customers have with salespeople is that if they don't know an answer, they will make one up to sound smart. New salespeople don't have many answers because they are just starting and learning. If you don't know the answer or are not 100% positive of the answer, don't make one up, don't stretch the truth and for goodness' sake, don't lie. Say that you don't know, and customers will respect you for being honest (because some salespeople aren't).

2. Stop what you're doing and get the answer — on the spot.

If you don't know an answer to a question, stop the presentation and immediately call the sales manager, a manufacturer rep, the service department or another resource needed while the customer is standing in front of you and get them the answer they need. After this happens a few times, the customer will



respect that you are honest enough to say that you don't know the answer to that question but will take immediate action to get one. This will help the customer to relax, trust you and appreciate your attention to detail and follow-up. Customers will also listen more intently to anything you say after that, because they will perceive you to be honest.

3. Write the question down. Make a note to follow up and get back to the customer before they leave. If it's an answer that is needed but not immediately, make a note to get the answer for them, regardless how small or insignificant the question is. Then get them the answer before you part company that day. This simply creates another opportunity for you to prove that no question is too small to deserve an answer. Chances are that while looking at RVs, they will forget they had a question but will be impressed that you didn't forget, which also solidifies their perception of your honesty and commitment to them.

4. If you can't get the answer, commit to a day and time to get back to them with an answer. If resources aren't available to get an answer that you need that day, give the customer the specific day and time (that's convenient for them) when you will get back to them by. A good way to say it is "I will call you tomorrow at 3 p.m. with the answer to this question." If for some reason you cannot get the answer by that day and time, call them tomorrow at 3 p.m. and say that. Then recommit to another day and time to get back to them. This will also reinforce their feeling that you will keep your word.

5. Explain what you're planning to do next and ask for permission. In each step of the sales process, give a brief comment of what you plan to do next, no matter what that step is. If you would like to get more information about where they plan to RV and how they plan to use it, tell them and ask if that is OK. If you plan on showing them three RVs that day, starting with the least expensive one, mention that and ask for their permission by saying something like "Sound good?" and wait for a response. This will reinforce their perception of your follow-through and help them feel comfortable that you aren't going to do anything that is a surprise to them and that you're not going to sneak up on them with anything.

6. Quickly recap their observations after looking at each RV in the lot. Each time you walk in an RV to present to them, upon walking out, stop for a minute to recap what they liked and did not like with that RV before moving onto the next. This will confirm some of the positive things you said about that RV. This also helps to solidify your words in their mind and reinforce why you showed it to them and how it might benefit their camping/RVing experience.

Taking the steps above during a customer visit will help blend your words with your actions and greatly improve their perception of your follow-through on anything that may come up in the shopping/buying process.

Here are a few final tips that will help you build credibility with great follow-through:

- Address the biggest issues or obstacles first. Doing so will make overcoming any other objection seem much easier.
- Make notes of key things the customer said and read it back to them during the visit to verify. This will show them you will listen closely to them and not forget things that matter to them.
- For every question that comes up during a customer visit, resolve them immediately, which will build your credibility as a "go-to" person and problem-solver.
- Whenever possible, don't move on to the next step until you follow up on the issue or question at that moment. That will help them close that issue in their mind and reduce the possibility of objections later in the process.

Completing the steps above will form great habits that will help make follow-through a solid strength for you, one that every customer you work with will notice immediately. RVP





JON ANDERS WIKEN/ADOBE STOCK

Being Present: A Key to Effective Leadership & an Emergent Culture

Build stronger relationships at work and increase productivity and results.

The world is transforming faster than ever. Many employees and leaders are feeling overwhelmed by rapidly evolving markets, a new generation entering the workforce and the impact of the digital age.

To adapt to these changes and continue to enable your organization to grow, you first need to look within. It all begins with presence. What does presence mean to you, and do you know how to experience what it is to be present in this moment right now?

What Is Presence?

Presence is about relearning how to be in the world and fully engaging in all of life's unique moments.

Many people are unproductive and unhappy because they haven't learned to slow down and maximize their effectiveness or optimize their innate intelligence. The impact of this extends beyond just the individual; the people around you, the people you lead and the culture of the organization are all impacted by someone who isn't clear and grounded (not present).



Margaret Graziano, known as the Evolutionist, is the founder and CEO of KeenAlignment, as well as a Wall Street Journal bestselling author for her book "Ignite Culture." She has been recognized as one of Silicon Valley's Top 100 Women Leaders and her groundbreaking work is driven by her power to uncover and catalyze human potential. For more information, visit margaretgraziano.com.



There are four main areas of development to consider when it comes to equipping yourself to be present.

1. Focus on Full Presence

The working world is full of things that can take you out of the present moment. Multitasking, keeping your cellphone on, constantly checking your emails and having many open windows on your computer are all things that distract people. Cognitive overload is the result of these distractions, leading people to experience an inability to focus and stay on track, bouts of agitation and increased distress, culminating in decreases in productivity and strained work relationships. No matter the skill or competence level, when a human being has too many things to keep track of, it's difficult to focus and complete tasks.

The impacts of distractions and cognitive load are not limited to productivity and relationships with others either. A Harvard University study found that mind wandering is also an indicator of a person's happiness. The more present someone was, the happier they reported themselves to be.

One of the most important things to do to get present is to remove yourself from the world of distraction. Attempt to implement some liberating constraints, such as turning your cellphone off during periods of focus, signing out of your email account and only logging in during scheduled email sessions, keeping only one or two windows open on your computer, and blocking out time to focus on specific tasks or projects.

Another way to keep yourself on track and in a present state of mind is to know, understand and experience what your ultimate purpose is and define what it looks like to operate in alignment with that purpose. When you do that, you give yourself the opportunity to tune in to what is important and how to work in service of that purpose.

2. Embrace Childlike Wonder

Childlike wonder is being completely immersed in the world around you. It's about coming from an open/neutral perspective, getting curious, asking questions and being aware of when you are judging and evaluating.

Many people become entrenched in their perspectives, beliefs, preferences, points of view, etc., as they grow up. To be fully present with others, you have to let go of your inherent or historical biases. Otherwise, it's as if you are viewing the world with orange-tinted glasses. Everything you experience is tinted orange because that's how you see and perceive. In this mindset, you won't be able to accept new and different ideas or engage with others you speak to.

When it comes to childlike wonder, it's about setting aside all biases, agendas, perceptions and beliefs about how things are going to go and being curious so you can truly connect and interact with others as an "empty vessel." When you are empty of perceptions, preferences, judgments, biases and beliefs, you are truly able to meet people where they are and enable them to not only feel like they are contributing, but to actually contribute.





ADOBE STOCK

> "ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO TO GET PRESENT IS TO REMOVE YOURSELF FROM THE WORLD OF DISTRACTION."

3. Master Sensory Acuity

Sensory acuity is using all our senses to observe the world around us in order to gather detailed information about the present moment. This is especially important for communication because there are other factors that contribute more to understanding someone than just their words. In fact, words make up only about 7% of communication.

Mastering sensory acuity requires using your other keen senses to expand how you see, perceive, understand and communicate with others. Things like tonality, where their eyes are looking, what color their face is (i.e., blushing), the shape of their mouth and how they are standing or sitting are all indicators of the way someone feels that is not communicated through their words.

Developing this skill requires you to focus entirely on the person with whom you are communicating. Mastering this not only allows you to read people at a higher level but also to understand and relate to them in a deeper manner, which is directly related to the fourth category.

4. Develop Rapport

Developing rapport is essential to cultivating healthy and harmonious relationships with those you work with and those in your personal life. Rapport is about understanding and respecting the feelings of others and, in doing so, strengthening your ability to work together.

Developing rapport requires you to establish trust. To do that, you need to be able to offer support, communicate effectively and follow through with what you say. The No. 1 way to break trust is to make promises you can't or don't keep. When you can't keep a commitment, make sure to alert people affected by it as soon as you know. Life gets in the way sometimes, and people will understand that a lot better when they are notified in advance of you breaking your agreement.

Elevate Your Leadership & Culture by Being Present

Presence at work is about being attuned to the task, function or project you're working on and the people around you. To be a high-performance leader and to cultivate an emergent culture, it's crucial that you make developing presence a core tenet of your leadership development. When you embody presence and inspire others to do the same, everyone grows in their ability to connect with each other and build stronger relationships at work, resulting in greater productivity, results and fulfillment. RVP



SAFETY SOLUTIONS & RIDE CONTROL



TIRE BLOWOUT PROTECTION

Armis RV Guardian, Seguin, Texas, presents its Armis RV Guardian, a patent-pending axle-mounted tire shrapnel containment shield system designed to protect RVs from the damage tire blowouts can cause. The unit bolts directly to the trailer axle with existing hardware. All Armis RV Guardian systems are manufactured and assembled in the company's Seguin, Texas, factory with cold-rolled steel and come with a limited-lifetime warranty. The company's goal is to help customers travel with the security and not be stranded with tire failures and major repairs.

armisrvguardian.com



MUD FLAP SYSTEM

Blue Ox, Pender, Nebraska, offers its Mud Flap System. Protect what you tow from rocks, mud and debris. The BX88420 is designed to work with trucks or motorhome applications with 2-inch receivers. The BX88421 has a 2.5-inch receiver. The mud flaps are adjustable side to side from 67 1/4 inch to 96 3/4 inch. The Blue Ox Mud Flap system features forged aluminum hubs and arms, stainless sleeved steel rods and 3/8-inch thick, 24-inch-by-24-inch-wide fiber reinforced mud flaps. The rock screen accessory is included to prevent damage to the towed vehicle.

blueox.com



WIRELESS CAMERA SYSTEM

Brandmotion, Novi, Michigan, offers its Wireless HD Observation System 7-inch Monitor. See all around your trailer or RV with the AHDS-7810v2 Observation System, virtually eliminating blind spots for safety and peace of mind. The system offers 1080p resolution, enhanced color night vision, real-time video DVR and more. Expand your visibility with up to four total cameras for ultimate visibility with the AHDS-7812 Side Marker Light Cameras or the AHDS-7811v2 Observation Camera. Easily compatible with popular prewired RVs.

brandmotion.com



WHEEL CHOCKS

Valterra Products, Mission Hills, California, presents its Wheel Chocks. Ensure your customers' safety and peace of mind with Valterra's Wheel Chocks. These durable chocks feature integrated grooves for superior tire grip, preventing rolling and sliding, and their solid polyethylene construction offers lasting strength. Easy-to-reach nylon cords allow for quick camp tear-down, while the compact size ensures convenient storage. Measures 7 inches long by 4.25 inches wide by 5 inches tall.

valterra.com



TIRE CAPS

CLC International, Leesburg, Indiana, offers its EZ Read Tire Caps. The indicator on EZ Read Tire Caps alerts you to changes in your tire pressure by changing color from green to yellow to red. EZ Read Tire Caps on your tires offers benefits such as extending the life of your tires, improving traction and mileage, and preventing flats and blowouts. They fit all standard valve stems — cars, trucks, trailers, RVs or any tire that has a standard valve stem and is between 26 to 110 psi.

clcinternationalinc.com

ASSIST SYSTEM

Dexter, Elkhart, Indiana, presents its Dexter Tow Assist, a system that includes an automotive-based ECU and axles with integrated wheel speed sensors, featuring anti-lock braking, sway mitigation and towable odometer. Tow Assist helps create a safer trailer towing experience for all skill levels, assisting with evasive maneuvers and avoiding critical towing errors. Installation is simple with an easy-to-use configuration kit and worry-free weatherproof connections under the trailer.

dexteraxle.com





SURGE PROTECTORS

Dicor Products, Elkhart, Indiana, offers its Dicor Surge Protectors. Ensure your RV's safety with Dicor Power's RV Surge Protectors, specifically designed to combat electrical surges from unpredictable power sources and adverse weather conditions. Available in both 30-amp and 50-amp models, these protectors are equipped with weather-resistant covers, secure locking metal rings on pigtail models and safety features like automatic shut-off/on, diagnostic lights and wiring fault indicators. Each unit also includes a limited lifetime warranty.

dicorproducts.com

TIRE PRESSURE MONITORING SYSTEM

Dill Air Controls, Oxford, North Carolina, presents its Bluetooth Aftermarket TPMS. This system includes your choice of four or six sensors per kit in either valve-mounted or band-mounted configurations. Sensors connect via Bluetooth to your smartphone or tablet and monitor tire pressure and temperature in real-time while in motion. The system can be upgraded to monitor up to 38 tires. The app can store over 30 different vehicle configurations. Compatible with Google, Android and Apple.

dillvalves.com







RUN-FLAT TIRE

Flats Over USA, Miami, Florida, offers its RV Safety Band (RVSB). The RVSB is an RV run-flat, a tire inside the tire that allows RV drivers to control their vehicles after a tire blowout and provides driving conditions to reach a safe place. The RVSB is an elastomer run-flat insert made of the same base material of RV tires. It is fitted to the rim with a specific torque and ready to use when you need it the most.

rvsafetyband.com

REPLACEMENT RV SHOCK ABSORBERS

Gabriel Ride Control, Farmington Hills, Michigan, presents its Premium and OE Replacement RV Shock Absorbers. Have you ever checked or replaced your RV's shocks? Shock absorbers wear out over time, so be sure to check them at least once every season; before you hit the road is best. Replace worn shocks with Gabriel to restore a smooth ride and better braking performance, so you can hit the road safely on your next adventure. Also, be sure to change your shocks when you invest in new RV tires to maximize tire life.

gabriel.com

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HELPER SPRINGS

Hellwig Products, Visalia, California, presents its Helper Springs. If your truck sags when you hitch up the camper, Hellwig Products Helper Springs are designed to sit on top of the leaf springs at the rear of your vehicle to effectively increase the level load rating up to the vehicle's gross vehicle weight rating. Hellwig Helper Springs are adjustable, easy to install and come with the hardware needed for installation. Hellwig offers several helper spring kits for popular trucks like Ford, GMC, Dodge, Toyota and more.

hellwigproducts.com



BANISTER RAIL

Stromberg Carlson, Traverse City, Michigan, presents its Lend-A-Hand Banister Rail. Stromberg's new Lend-A-Hand Banister Rail provides steady, smooth support as you go up or down steps. The familiar banister-style rail features an anodized finish with ribbed tubing for a better grip. No tools are required to fold and lock the rail flat against your RV when traveling. The 42-inch model extends 36.8 inches from the wall at a 38-degree angle and is designed for double and some triple steps. The 50-inch rail, for some triple and all quad steps, offers two positions. The 38-degree position extends 40.8 inches while the 45-degree angle extends 36.8 inches.

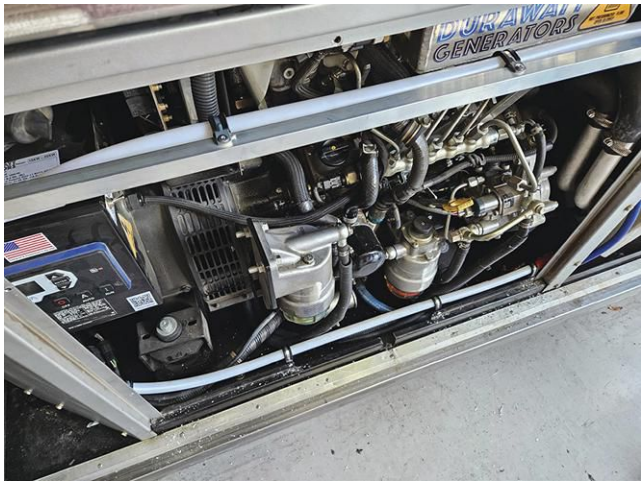
strombergcarlson.com



STEERING STABILIZERS

NTP-STAG, Exeter, Pennsylvania, offers its Roadmaster Reflex Steering Stabilizer. Reflex Steering Stabilizers are a safety feature for Class A and C motorhomes, SUVs, vans and emergency vehicles. Tempered steel springs, which are attached to the tie-rods and undercarriage, automatically compensate for oversteer caused by potholes, rut tracks and other unfavorable road conditions, as well as crosswinds and passing 18-wheelers. The springs react instantaneously to bring the vehicle back to center.

viantp.com



AUTOMATIC FIRE PROTECTION DEVICE

Proteng Distribution, Wellington, Florida, presents its THIA Automatic Fire Detection & Suppression. THIA automatic fire protection devices can eliminate or prevent fires in less than a second with a heat-activated delivery system that can be custom-installed in high-risk areas. THIA is automatic and autonomous — no manual deployment needed, no canister, no power source — it does the job on its own, often before an operator is aware of any threat. THIA uses clean agent FM-200, and is rated for use on Class A, B and C type fires. THIA requires no maintenance and can function for over a decade.

proteng.com



RV SAFETY PLANOGRAM

Orion Safety Products, Easton, Maryland, offers its RV Safety Center Planogram. Based on dealer feedback and the results of a national survey of 468 consumers, an RV Center Planogram was created that includes a compact camper RV kit, first aid kit, orange safety vest, DOT-compliant triangles, rain poncho, emergency blanket and lightsticks. In the consumer survey, over 60% of respondents indicated they would definitely or probably buy these products if they were available at retail.

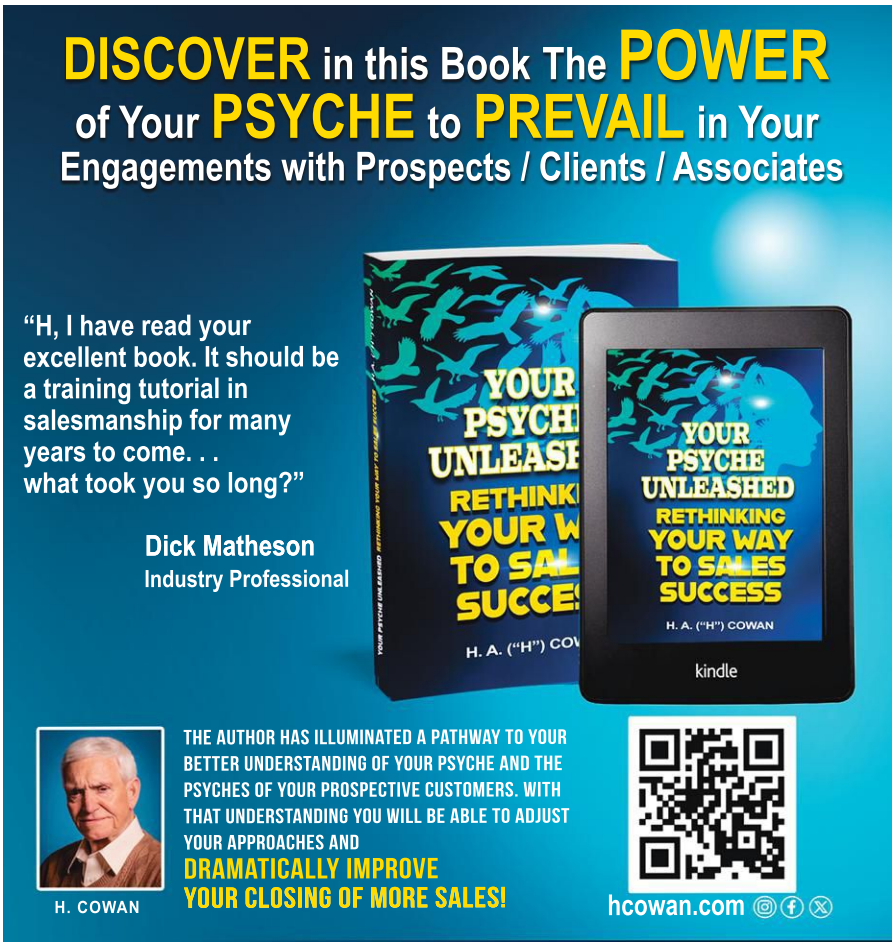
orionsignals.com



PORTABLE POWER STATION & JUMP STARTER

Schumacher Electric, Fort Worth, Texas, offers its Schumacher Electric SL1653 Lithium Portable Power Station and Jump Starter, which serves as a jump starter for RVs and more. The device delivers 3000 amps of lithium power with the ability to jump-start a vehicle up to 50 times on a single charge. It doubles as a power bank, charging smartphones and tablets for on-the-go convenience, even under extreme conditions. Ensure uninterrupted journeys with the reliable power and versatility of the SL1653.

schumacherelectric.com





SUSPENSION ENHANCEMENT

SuperSprings International, Carpinteria, California, presents its SuperSprings, SumoSprings and Coil SumoSprings, which all provide your RV with stability, control and ride comfort. Between the steel SuperSprings and micro-cellular polyurethane SumoSprings, your vehicle will experience reduced sway and body roll and increased passenger comfort on your journey.

superspringsinternational.com



SUSPENSION ENHANCEMENT SYSTEM

Timbren Industries, Whitby, Ontario, Canada, offers its Timbren SES Suspension Enhancement System. Unstable loads don't just make for an uncomfortable ride — difficult handling, rear squat and corner sway create dangerous driving conditions for you, your passengers, other drivers, your vehicle and your equipment. Timbren SES kits, made with patented Aeon springs, solve your towing and hauling problems, preventing crosswind sway and body roll. All at a price point for any wallet and an installation for any skill level.

timbren.com





HITCH LOCK

Ultra-Fab Products, Elkhart, Indiana, offers its MegaHitch Lock. Guard RVs with one of the toughest coupler locks available to safeguard against trailer theft. Difficult for thieves to cut, pry or disable the lock, the lock is constructed of heavy-duty solid steel and provides advanced protection. It fits all 2-inch and 2 5/16-inch couplers, is watertight and corrosion resistant, and simple to operate. Includes two keys and a lifetime warranty.

ultra-fab.com



WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION HITCH

Weigh Safe, Lindon, Utah, presents its True Tow Weight Distribution Hitch. The Weigh Safe True Tow Weight Distribution Hitch – Middleweight, which is part of the True Tow family, measures vehicular tongue weight and provides the exact measurement and force needed to accurately redistribute weight across your towing system. It also boasts a simple, quick and accurate installation process and comes in a range of drop lengths and shank sizes for various applications.

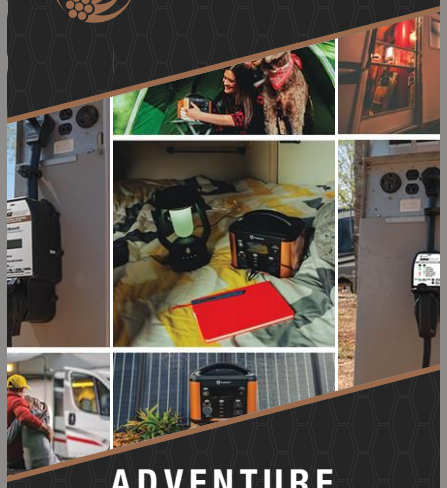
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Pit Stop



NOW HIRING: Your Dream Job



Harvest Hosts, a membership program offering RVers access to unique camping locations, is hiring a **chief retirement officer** to traverse the country and "retire in style." The candidate gets a fully furnished fifth wheel and must:

- Be 30-plus with a valid U.S. driver's license
- Love road trips and scoping out North America's "most relaxing locations"
- Deliver weekly content showcasing Harvest Host sites
- Participate in quarterly all-hands meetings to share highlights of leaving the 9-5 grind and why everyone should consider retirement

Apply for CRO at HarvestHosts.com

MAY SHIPMENTS

33,150 (units)
Total RV shipments

7.2% increase compared to May 2023 (30,919 units)

To date, RVs are up 8.9% with 153,288 shipped through May

"As the summer RV travel season kicks into high gear, 45 million Americans will make lasting memories with friends and family as they get out and go RVing this summer," said RVIA President and CEO Craig Kirby. "Shipments are continuing to show moderate increases over last year as units head to dealerships across the country where consumers will find an RV to fit every budget and lifestyle."



According to a new report from Kampgrounds of America, ***34% of new campers identify as "glampers."*** Key findings from the past year include:

- Nearly half of those who tried glamping for the first time were millennials with disposable income — 37% report a household income of $100,000 or more.
- 1-in-3 new glamping households included Black (20%) or Hispanic (13%) guests.
- 4-in-10 glampers say safety is a main factor in the glamping attraction.

The RV Industry Association, along with over **250 outdoor recreation organizations,** issued a letter to the U.S. Senate mid-June urging **swift passage of the EXPLORE Act.** The bipartisan legislation passed the House in April by unanimous consent. The act would increase access and transform outdoor rec opportunities across the U.S. "Congress is closer than ever to making history and passing the first-ever outdoor recreation-specific bill package," says Jessica Wahl Turner, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable president. "From businesses, associations and conservation groups to veteran organizations and state outdoor recreation offices, there is overwhelming support for the EXPLORE Act spanning the entire $1.1 trillion outdoor recreation economy."

Alone But Not Lonely

The Dyrt found that solo camping continues to trend upward — in 2023, 29.8% of campers camped alone at least one night. That number has steadily risen from 18.8% in 2021.

The Dyrt community indicated many reasons for camping alone, from desiring cross-country solo trips to simply wanting to get away from everyone.

The rise in solo camping directly correlates with a significant rise in free camping — nearly two-thirds of respondents camped for free in 2023, up from 47.5% in 2021.



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