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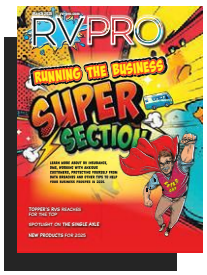
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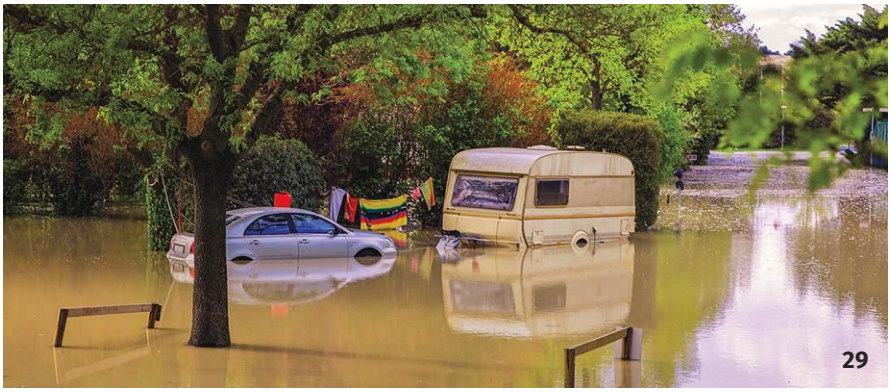





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Jennifer King

When I was starting out as a newspaper reporter in my 20s, I used to attend town council meetings and board of education meetings, and my duty was to report the facts. Now, after almost two decades of working in magazine publishing, that is still the goal that I aim to achieve every day. But as media has evolved, so have I, and I have come to the conclusion, albeit somewhat reluctantly, that part of what I do these days is influence. But I am not an "influencer" in the same realm as social media influencers. No, I, and the RV PRO team, influence by the topics we choose to cover and the experts we enlist in helping us bring information to our readers.

In actuality, though, you are the true influencers. We at RV PRO turn to the readers of this magazine — who range from dealership owners to repair techs, suppliers and aftermarket company reps, OEMs, consultants and more — to understand what it is you want to know and what you need to learn in order to run successful businesses. It is with that knowledge that we craft every issue of this magazine and, in this issue in particular, how we put together the Running the Business Super Section, starting on page 28. This section is so jam-packed with takeaways and great info to share with your colleagues that we had to call it "Super." With stories from Comparion Insurance, Lightspeed, CBIZ and regular contributors Mel Selway, Thomas Morin, Tom Kline and more, we hope these articles help make you even more successful in 2025.

This month's New Products section is another point of influence — turn to page 46 to see what's hot and new on the market. The Supplier/Aftermarket coverage also goes a long way to keep you informed about the latest and greatest (page 24), and our interviews with OEMs keep us in the know about the coolest RV units on the road (page 14). This month we highlight single-axle travel trailers — one built in the Land Down Under and one in Tennessee. We share the stories behind the models and the companies, and hopefully get you excited about selling these units and others to your customers.

Finally, one of our favorite sections, the Dealer Profile, feels extra-special this month. This is where you hear straight from dealers like you on how they have achieved success and the challenges they've overcome. I had the privilege of interviewing the newly elected board chair for the RV Dealers Association, Larry Troutt III, who I am confident will shake things up in a good way and influence you all to get involved and use your RVDA connections in advantageous ways.

We at RV PRO hope you feel influenced to make the most of your business, your employees and the potential of the RV industry after reading this issue. As NTP-STAG keynote speaker Justin Forsett said at the recent expo, "If you want to level up your game, you must build a huddle. You must find a group of people that you can do life with." So, thank you for being a part of our huddle. If you ever have an idea for an article or a hot tip you'd like to share, please get in touch!

And as always, thank you for reading!

Jennifer King



My little superhero, 2018

RV PRO

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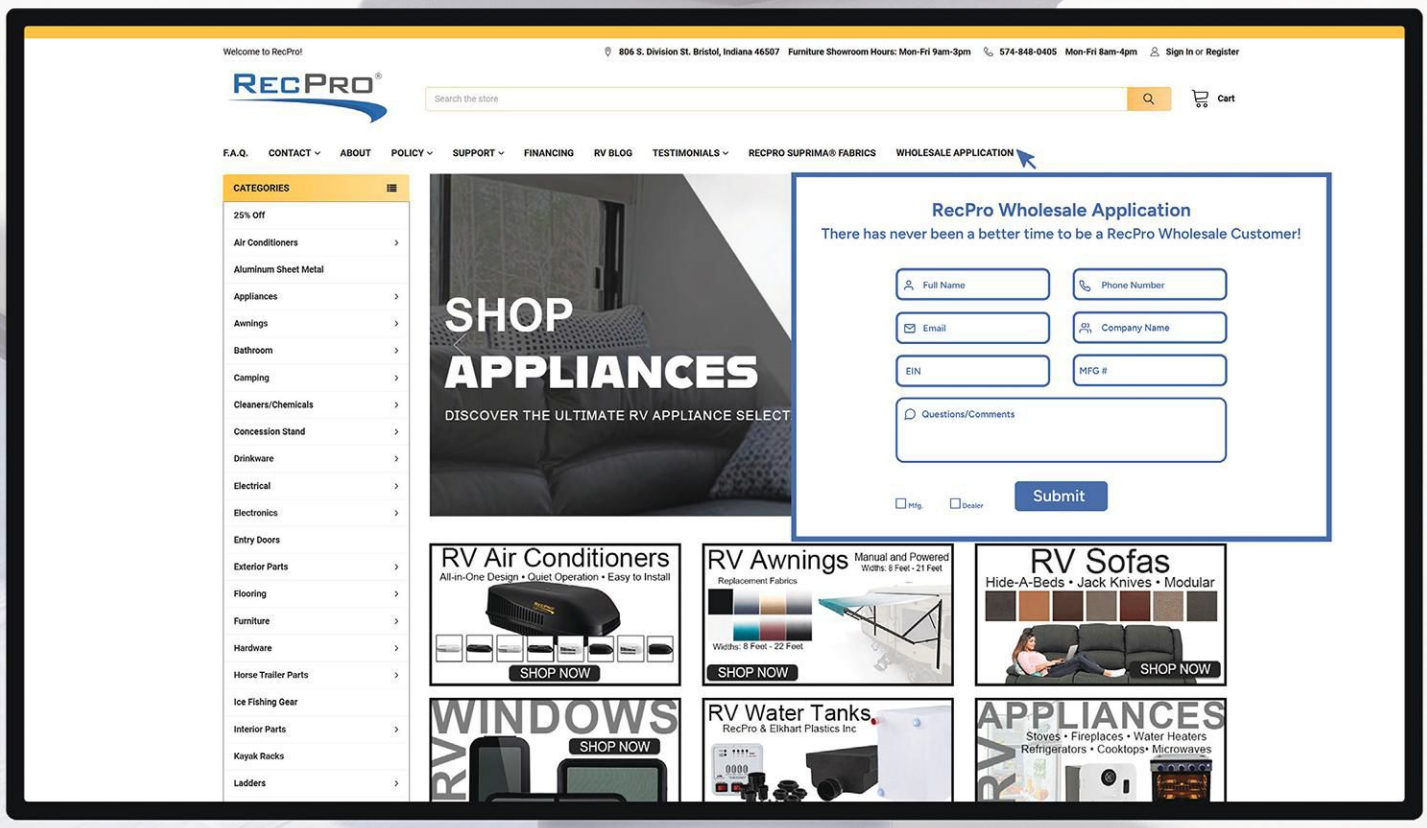
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# *Don't Stop Persevering*

## The 2025 NTP-STAG Expo returned to Colorado with a turnout pointing to good signs ahead.

**BY JORDAN BENSCHOP, RV PRO SENIOR MANAGING EDITOR**



**Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center**



**Students from Littleton Public Schools learn from suppliers on the expo floor.**

"Greatness grows best in the shadows," said an enthusiastic Justin Forsett — former NFL running back and keynote speaker of this year's NTP-STAG Expo — to a bustling crowd the morning of Jan. 21.

The Pennsylvania-based distributor and division of LKQ Specialty brought its annual two-day expo back to Aurora, Colorado, this year — a place familiar to Forsett, who wrapped his nine-year career as a Denver Bronco.

NTP-STAG President Bill Rogers welcomed the Pro Bowler, entrepreneur and broadcaster to the stage after setting a precedence of "perseverance" for hundreds of attendees across the RV and marine industries. That feeling carried on throughout the event, held in conjunction with sister distributor SeaWide Marine at the 480,000-square-foot Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center.

"If you want to level up your game, you must build a huddle. You must find a group of people that you can do life with," Forsett said during his Tuesday presentation. "Peyton Manning would give me three things at every single huddle: he would give me warning, he would give me encouragement and he would give me instruction."

Those three things don't only play into football, he said, but the nature of business when facing uncertainty. The RV industry is collectively planning for a future of unknowns, but dealer and supplier attendees expressed positivity for what's to come among the good attendance and strong business at the market's final distributor show. Many agreed that sentiment echoed through experiences had at the 2025 Florida RV SuperShow, held just before the expo in Tampa.

Along with sincere advice, Forsett garnered laughs from the crowd after asking Rogers to join him on stage, where the two sat together in a hypothetical car jamming to Journey's "Don't Stop Believing." Forsett asked Rogers how he could best support him. Rogers said, "Buy RV parts."

Many dealers wait for the January event to take advantage of special deals. The wide variety of parts and accessories on display were even enough to spark the interest of 29 high school students, who joined NTP-STAG's event as part of an ongoing recruitment initiative with the RV Technical Institute (RVTI).

Part of Colorado's Littleton Public Schools, the group is connected to the Explorative Pathways for Innovative Careers (EPIC) campus — where RVTI now offers a semester-long Level 1 tech training course. The aim is to raise awareness of the institute's program and encourage schools to integrate it into their cirriculum, giving students RV technician skills.

"The experience was awesome. Several of the students who attended said that it was eye-opening and exciting to see — they were not aware all this went into making or upgrading an RV," said Justin Rickett, the students' guide and RVTI's senior manager of recruitment. "I personally, and RVTI, cannot thank NTP-STAG enough for letting the students attend and see firsthand how awesome our industry and the people who work in it are."

Also on the expo floor was the returning Outdoor Recreation Area, sponsored by Dometic, displaying new innovations and hot products — including Xponent Power's solar awning, now hooked up to an app for easy control. Many suppliers said their eyes were on making bestsellers more streamlined and convenient to use, in addition to releasing new products that consumers are seeking.

NTP-STAG gave its annual Most Innovative Product Award to silwy Magnetic System, a first-time expo exhibitor and Germany-based supplier looking to branch into the U.S. market. Silwy's founder and CEO Christoph Fritz said the company is popular internationally for its patented magnetic glasses and dishes, which prevent rattling and sliding tableware when on the go.

"It's a must-have for all camping and boating lovers all over the world. We're solving annoying problems on the road, on water and in the air," the company said.

GEN-Y Hitch was also in the spotlight, winning the distributor's New Product of the Year recognition for its next-gen Advantage Combo Hitch.

Airxcel returned as the 2025 event's title sponsor. Educational PRO sessions, lively presentations and a vibrant show floor — which many agreed had heavy foot traffic, especially on the first day — are always an annual draw. Dealer trainings were packed, with sessions from suppliers like Dometic's Go Power! seeing nearly 250 attendees and standing room only, said Eva Mitic, marketing manager and member of RV PRO's Editorial Advisory Board. The expo's Marine Certification session also saw its largest dealer attendance to date. RVP

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# HOW RV CONSUMERS HAVE BEEN SEARCHING FOR TRAVEL TRAILERS



## Top Travel Trailer Makes by Search Results

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

Since 2022, Forest River has consistently ranked as the most popular travel trailer brand on RV Trader. Meanwhile, year-over-year comparisons show that Airstream gained significant momentum in 2024, climbing into the second-most popular spot.

## Top Travel Trailer Models in 2024




Grand Design Imagine has consistently been the most popular model since 2022, while interest in Airstream Flying Cloud propelled it to 2024's second-most popular model. Forest River claimed two of the top 5 spots with the R-Pod and Rockwood Mini Lite models, while Jayco's Jay Flight SLX rounded out the list for the second year in a row.

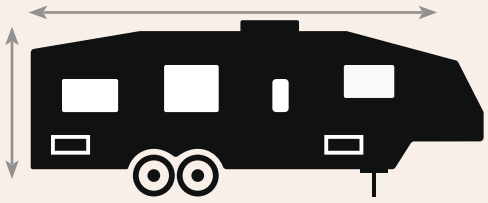
*With a 9% increase in used inventory on RV Trader year over year, and a 14% increase in buyer interest, market trends continue to favor the economic benefits of used travel trailers over the features of newer models. Forest River remains the most popular travel trailer make, with its models securing two of the top 5 most popular spots in 2024. Keystone, Jayco, Airstream and Grand Design also continue to dominate the rest of the field.*

*Buyers are prioritizing features like teardrop designs, king beds and sleeping capacities of three to six. To drive sales, dealers should highlight how specific models and features meet consumer desires, as buyers continue looking for trailer options that make the most of a small space and provide long-term value in their investment.*

## New vs. Used Class A RVs

RV Trader saw continued growth in used travel trailer inventory in 2024, up 9% from the year prior and 12% since 2022.

## Top Lengths Searches for Travel Trailer RVs



The following are the most popular lengths (in feet) for travel trailers from January 2024 through December 2024 on RV Trader.

1. **22 feet**
2. **29 feet**
3. **21 feet**
4. **20 feet**
5. **30 feet**

## Top Sleeping Capacity for Travel Trailers

In 2024, consumers were interested in trailers that sleep three to six, with trailers that accommodate four being the most popular.

1. **4**
2. **3**
3. **6**



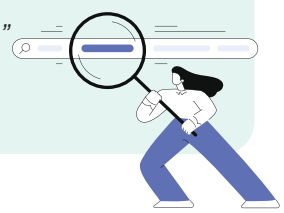
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*RV Trader, a part of the "Trader" family of brands and owned by Trader Interactive, is the leading marketplace for advertising RVs, motorhomes and campers. With an average of 6.5 million monthly visitors, RV Trader offers innovative tools to help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

## Keyword Searches on RV Trader

Consumers who have searched for travel trailers have also searched for the following keywords:

1. *"Teardrop"*
2. *"Camper"*
3. *"Bunkhouse"*
4. *"Mini"*
5. *"King bed"*



*SOURCE: RV TRADER SEARCH ACTIVITY FOR TRAVEL TRAILERS, JANUARY–DECEMBER 2024.

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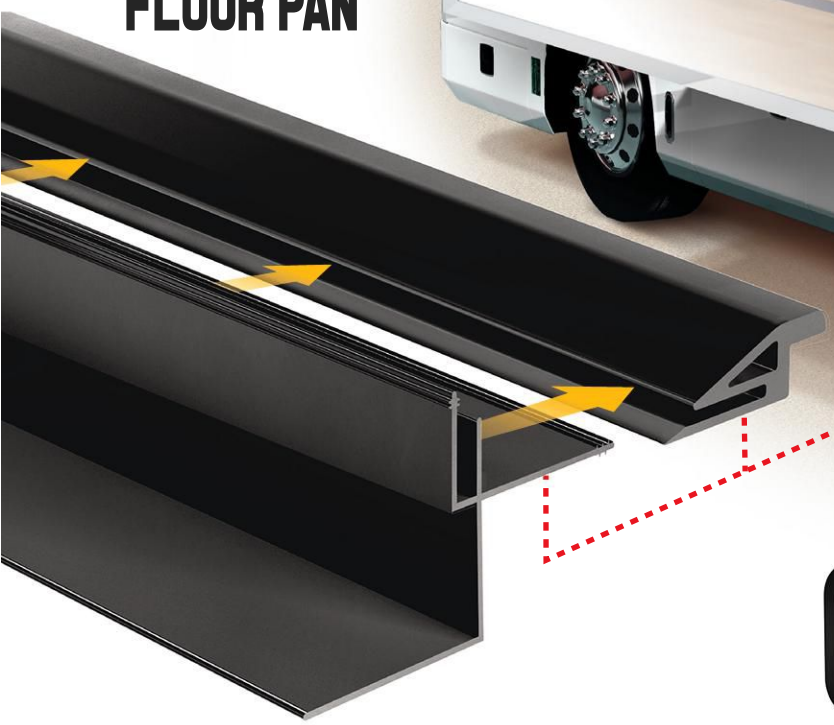


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# An Australian Dream Comes Stateside

## Crusader Caravans from the Land Down Under brings Dreamhaven RV's Gladiator Force to the U.S.

BY JENNIFER KING, RV PRO EXECUTIVE EDITOR

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DREAMHAVEN RV

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***From "My Country" by Dorothea Mackellar***

*I love a sunburnt country*
*A land of sweeping plains*
*Of ragged mountain ranges*
*Of droughts and flooding rains*
*I love her far horizons*
*I love her jewel-sea*
*Her beauty and her terror —*
*The wide brown land for me!*

Born in the land of rugged roads that turn into no roads at all and temperatures that can range from highs of 120 F to lows of 45 F, Dreamhaven RV's Gladiator Force is built for survival.

Dreamhaven RV is a pro at building RVs that can handle tough terrain and conditions. The brand was created by Australia's Crusader Caravans, which has been in business since 2002 when it was started by Serge Valentino, who has had decades of caravan-building experience. The company's manufacturing plant in Melbourne is where all its units are built. It was just a few years ago when the Dreamhaven offshoot set its sights on the U.S. market. The first two models offered — the Gladiator Force and the Chameleon — are compact, lightweight and built to handle the rough roads of Australia's midcontinent where, really, there aren't many roads at all.

"The difference in Australia is the roads go around the perimeter," says Roy Carter, one of Dreamhaven's U.S. distributors. "So you have to drive around the coast if you want to drive on a road. Now you can drive across the interior, but it may not be paved for a lot of the road. So there are travel trailers — they don't call 'em travel trailers in Australia, they call 'em caravans — but their travel trailers are made to be able to put up with the punishment of being on an unpaved road."

Built in Australia and distributed by Carter and his business partner Lindsey Stults stateside, units are available at a handful of East Coast and West Coast dealerships — and Dreamhaven is looking to expand its reach in the land of the Stars and Stripes.

The growing popularity of overlanding in the U.S. is appealing to Dreamhaven.

"Obviously traveling across paved roads here in the U.S., and then a little bit of overlanding, going off-road, means that they are built to take that type of punishment — the suspension, the hitch, the construction method," Carter says.

Dreamhaven RVs are built end to end with an insulated fiberglass, which is strong and lightweight, the company says. The one-piece construction of the walls, floor and roof help with water resistance and structural integrity and is similar to how trucks, trains and planes have been built for years, Dreamhaven's website explains.

"I would say [the building process is] newish, yes. It's the way that some European brands have been manufacturing for a while," Carter says. "[We use] two sheets of fiberglass with a closed-cell foam core in the middle; it's just over 1 inch thick. It has a very high insulating value, so it's great in that it keeps the cold out in winter and keeps the heat out in summer. The construction process means that [it] has a very high level of rigidity."



The Gladiator Force is a compact model with independent suspension and built on a 6-inch chassis. It includes a toilet, wet bath, refrigerator, microwave, dual solar panels and a gray water tank. Its mattress can be formed into one queen-size bed or two twin beds. The overall length is 20 feet, 8 inches; overall height is 9 feet, 9 inches; the gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) is 5,952 pounds.

Carter describes the interior as an "interlocking structure — like a jigsaw." This also helps the unit stay intact while traveling over rough terrain.

Ana Jardim, marketing coordinator for Crusader Caravans, said the interlocking system is built so that it can hold itself up even without the walls.

"When you are going through the building process here in the factory ... we have the walls and then we marry the roof. And the roof is one piece that goes from the front to the end of the caravan," she says. "The way that we construct is amazing. I've never seen anything like that."

Dreamhaven went for a serene atmosphere with its interior decor, looking to create a "home away from home" with dusky grays and muted tones that make the unit feel tranquil, the company says.

## COMING TO AMERICA

When Crusader Caravans first considered entering the U.S. market, they knew they needed to do so under a different name as another brand already existed here under that name. Dreamhaven was an easy choice, since it had been under consideration as the company's name during its inception.

Next on the agenda was connecting with someone who could serve as a liaison in the states. Enter Tony Munro, who recommended Carter and Stults. Their first task? Helping the









company gain certification from the RV Industry Association (RVIA) — which thankfully, they did.

While the vehicles are made in Australia, they're constructed with all the necessary specifications for an RVIA-approved RV in the U.S. At first, this was a bit tricky for the engineering and manufacturing team — switching the entry door from one side to the other, among other items.

Dreamhaven partners with some of the same component providers as it does for Crusader's models, and others are specific to the U.S. models. Those companies include Dometic, Furrion, Grip Sport, Houghton, Majestic, BMPRO and Creative Composites, among others.

Typically if a customer is looking for a Gladiator Force or a Chameleon, one can be made available from the company's dealership partners in the U.S. If a unit is needed from the plant in Melbourne, it can take 90 days from order to delivery, Carter says. While all units used to ship across the Pacific Ocean to Long Beach, California, they now have access to ship them into Florida as well, he added.

One region they're focusing on expanding in is the West — Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and more.

"These off-roading elements of the vehicles make them particularly conducive to that Western, more rugged environment," Carter says.

## A CHASSIS OF THEIR OWN

One thing that sets Crusader Caravans and Dreamhaven RVs apart is manufacturing its own chassis. Carter explains that it is a box section chassis that is roughly 6 inches high.

"At the points that get stressed, like under the vehicle, that's doubled up. So there's actually 12 inches of chassis height there," he says.

The Gladiator Force, and all Dreamhaven models, come fully loaded as standard with two 100-watt solar panels, and the Gladiator Force has a 200-amp-hour lithium ion battery.

Both the Gladiator Force and the Chameleon come standard with a twin bike carrier with a garage near the hitch point on the front that holds propane bottles. The Gladiator Force just allows for more internal space and storage.

Climate control is also key, with the Dometic air conditioner on the roof and two 12-volt fans that work in multiple directions, full fly screens and also blackout blinds.

"So you have the option to have it as dark, have it as light, and have it as cool, or have it as warm as you wish," Carter says. "Climate control is a key feature inside the vehicles."

## PRIDE OF AUSTRALIA

The manufacturing plant in Melbourne is only a couple years old and houses about 250 employees. Jardim says it was exciting to get to launch a product for the U.S.

"Even though we are a large company, it feels like family. Everyone is so proud to be working at Crusader," she says. "I think at first, everyone got so confused when we started introducing the Dreamhaven brand because the caravans started coming up on the other side, you know, the doors had to be switched, everything's kind of mirrored around. [Now] I think everyone is very proud of where the company's taking [it]. We have grown so much, and everyone is very excited.

"We know the product that we produce here is high quality. We put a lot of love into building that caravan. I think everyone's very proud to know that we are there." RVP

# The Ollie Effect

Oliver Travel Trailers has a sturdy reputation for its explorer-friendly Legacy Elite.

BY JOHN MCCURRY

PHOTOS COURTESY OF OLIVER TRAVEL TRAILERS

If an RV's owners bestow it with a nickname, it's probably a good sign. That's true with Oliver Travel Trailers, whose growing fan base affectionately refers to the sturdy fiberglass luxury campers as "Ollies."

A relatively young, family-owned company, Oliver Travel Trailers (OTT) is based in Hohenwald, Tennessee, about 80 miles southwest of Nashville. The distinctive-looking trailers featuring curved corners and sleek sides are designed to boost towing efficiencies.

The company did not take the typical route into travel trailer manufacturing. That shift came in result of the needs of the family's other companies, Oliver Technologies and Oliver Fiberglass Products.

Scott Oliver, who co-owns the company along with his brother, John, says the company's initial business involved the production of foundation products to secure manufactured homes. His dad, Jim, who retired in 2018, moved the company to Tennessee from California in 1995. The move into travel trailer production was gradual, and not without challenges.

"If you look at Nashville, Tennessee, it is about 500 miles from North Carolina, Florida, Michigan and Texas, which is about 80% of the manufactured home industry. As we were growing that business, we would travel around showing installers how to use our products."

The travel trailer business arose from a need that developed while the company was servicing its manufactured homes



business — OTT bought several campers for its representatives to serve the segment in remote areas. Those campers were used heavily and didn't hold up well over time because they weren't designed to take that kind of beating. The Olivers eventually decided to build their own durable trailers.

"The family was up in Highland Park, near the Montana-Idaho border, doing some elk hunting," Oliver recalls. "While we were there, they had a foot of snow on the ground, and it was cold. Pipes were freezing, among other challenges. We got to talking about whether we could develop a camper that would stand up to what we were putting them through. That kind of started things in a new direction."

With the help of boat builders, Scott Oliver's father, Jim, and his uncle, John, developed a prototype in a garage on the family farm. The first camper was ready in 2007, but just as the company was set to grow, the Great Recession hit.

"We mothballed the company in 2009, because of what was happening in the industry, and reopened in 2014," Oliver says. "Dad had retired by that time, and between him, my brother John and myself, we opened it back up and started growing the company again."

Oliver Travel Trailers has been a factory-direct seller for most of its existence. That changed in late 2023 when the company, responding to customer needs, launched a dealer network. That network, now at 14, is scattered throughout the U.S.

"We found that certain customers could not come back to Tennessee as often as we would like, so we began to partner with dealers," Oliver says. "We work with dealers such as Lazydays in Florida, with three locations, and Bretz RV in Montana, Idaho and Washington."

The current number of dealers is the right number for now. The company may gradually add to the network.

"It is more about helping the dealers we have, building those relationships and educating the dealers and customers," Oliver says. "One of the challenges is getting our expertise into the hands of our dealers and their sales teams, to be able to share all of the unique qualities and aspects of the Oliver camper, so that it makes it to the potential owners, so that they understand why it costs what it does, and what are the features and benefits that we put into each one."

Oliver says the new dealer network has allowed the manufacturer to boost its customer service. Customers can see trailers at a dealership lot rather than traveling long distances to the plant in Tennessee.

"We still have our flagship location here in Tennessee, where we promote our products," he says. "We still have interested visitors who want to learn more about our campers, and we take them on a factory tour. It has been a transition for us, going from straight consumer direct to dealer model, so as with any new process, there are always bugs to be worked out. We feel comfortable working through those with our dealer partners."

## MADE TO TOUR AMERICA

The Olivers produce their trailers in an approximately 330,000-square-foot facility. The parent company, Oliver Fiberglass Products, also manufactures its line of Safe Step walk-in bathtubs in the same building. Trailer production fluctuates, but on average, Oliver builds two to three campers per week.

"We have a lot of background in the fiberglass industry," Oliver




says. He notes that the company's central Tennessee location offers an ideal logistics platform from which to serve several neighboring states.

Oliver Travel Trailers' primary differentiator is its double-hull construction. The trailers have two inner shells and two outer shells, similar to a boat.

"This allows you to be a true four-season camper, because the electrical and plumbing components are located between the inner and outer shells, instead of protruding below the camper," Oliver says. "The shells are bonded together, and the overhead compartments and seating are molded in, so when you are traveling, you don't have the possibility of those coming loose or separating from the floor or walls."

OTT's construction process starts from the ground up. It builds on frames, in-house.

They are constructed with a 2-inch-by-5-inch quarter-wall tubing, with a 3-inch-by-5-inch-by-5/8-inch thick tongue, which is all aluminum. The company then welds a steel chassis for axle assembly that actually bolts onto the aluminum frame.

OTT's chassis are built out of high-grade, aircraft-quality aluminum, which is less susceptible to rust. Most others are built with steel, the company says. Oliver uses Dexter Nev-R-Lube axles, leaf springs and gas shocks to improve ride quality. The underside of the trailer is enclosed to conceal tanks and water lines from outside elements.

OTT uses Leaf Spring axles with Dexter E-Z Flex shocks, which Oliver says absorb 80% of the shock traveling down the road. That is a standard feature on both models.

"The fiberglass shells bolt on, and then all your components get placed inside," he says. "We build all of our own wire harnesses in-house. That helps with that quality control process. Each of our stations on the manufacturing line have a quality process throughout, to make sure each step is done correctly before moving on to the next station.

"Another unique thing is that with our awnings and other components, we actually glass in our aluminum backing plates, so if you are installing a solar panel or air conditioner or other component, we have that glued in, to be well-secured within the fiberglass."

Oliver describes the company's typical customer as someone who "wants to tour America." The trailers sleep three but are primarily designed for couples.

"They are for people who want to explore state and national parks, tour the West or go to Alaska," he says. "They are easier to tow, because the width has the same footprint as the vehicle towing it, so it has a good line of sight."

Oliver manufactures two models: the Legacy Elite and Legacy Elite II. The single-axle Legacy Elite is shorter at 18 feet, 5 inches, while the tandem-axle Legacy Elite II is 23 feet, 6 inches. Both come in Premium and Platinum packages.

"We have our premier premium, which is our base model, and then our platinum, which has 85% of the options that people have requested over the years, making it easier for dealers to serve our customers," Oliver says. "They can still order the premium model and select certain upgrades."

"My brother (John) and I grew up in this business, and we have been camping our whole lives," Oliver says. "We love being able to share that experience with others and continue those family values that were instilled in us, the importance of gathering together around a campfire and enjoying the outdoors with family or friends."

Discussing future projects, Oliver says the company has an opportunity to work on components to help Ollie fans go off-grid. The resiliency of Ollies and their four-hull design make them ideal for off-grid adventures.

"We already have solar and lithium and inverters and so on available on our campers, but we want to help them more, by using a more strategic design to help them go off-road camping.

"Our small family company gives us an advantage and helps us be nimble and be closer to our customers, enabling us to be responsive to their feedback perhaps a bit quicker. This new opportunity we are exploring to expand the off-road components will continue to improve the quality of camping off-grid and has a lot of possibilities for us in the future." RVP

# REACHING FOR THE TOP

The new RVDA board chair and owner of **Topper's RVs** finds success by learning from others and keeping things fresh.

BY JENNIFER KING, RV PRO EXECUTIVE EDITOR

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TOPPER'S RVS




There's one word on Larry Troutt III's mind for his position as the newly elected board chair of the RV Dealers Association: engagement.

Troutt, who is the third generation to lead his family's RV dealership Topper's RVs in Waller, Texas, near Houston, says increasing involvement, not just at the RVDA Con/Expo every year but in the organization as a whole, is a top priority.

Education and advocacy are two areas where Troutt says the RVDA is "dialed in." The association is doing a great job in this area, and many more.

"So let's find something else to work on," he says. "We've got a great membership base, but our engagement numbers aren't that great … even at the convention, we'll only get 20% participation out of the dealers at the convention."

Troutt says while the convention is just part of what RVDA does for its membership, the value of the education you can get there and take back to your dealership is unsurpassed. But additional networking opportunities could help a lot.

"It's a different conversation when you're sitting around with music and a drink or whatever and not in the office," he says.

"We're trying to create a setting where it's the cool thing to do. It's the cool place to come. It's where you're going to meet people, you're going to get opportunities, you're going to garnish relationships that you'll have for the rest of your life on top of all the educational opportunities there as well."

Larry Trout Jr. (left) and Larry Troutt III



## CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

While taking the RVDA Con/Expo down a path that will make it "not the same ol' convention your dad went to," Troutt is also running Topper's RVs as the general manager and owner — and it is the same ol' place his father ran, and his grandfather before that.

But that doesn't mean Topper's RVs hasn't adapted to the times.

Topper's got its start in 1967 when his grandfather, Larry Troutt Sr., opened the business with his partner. The business began by selling pickup covers, hence the name Topper's. When his father, Larry Troutt Jr. — who will be a 2025 RV/MH Hall of Fame inductee — came in during the 1980s, travel trailers were part of the business.

Troutt III got his feet in the door, right where a lot of kids in the business start off: with a hose, soap and sponge.

"I was washing travel trailers … I was cleaning countertops and sweeping floors. We'd always be up at the dealership I'd say starting around 10 or 11. I was running around up there, doing the typical stuff — it's a familiar story for a lot of us," Troutt says.

The best place to hang out was in the back "with the guys," he says.

"So they obviously put me to work, see if I can handle anything. A little bit of hazing and a little bit of 'see if this kid can put up with some stuff,'" he says with a laugh.

By 2006, Troutt was employed at the dealership full-time.

The business was located inside the Houston city limits but moved out to Waller — about 45 minutes outside of the city center — after he came onboard full-time.

"I was getting eight bucks an hour. I took a pay cut to come in, and he started me at the bottom and we worked all the way up," Troutt says. "[In] 2016, I took over the store, and that's when we announced that I was GM."

His father is the CEO now and plays an advisory role with the business, continuing to attend budget meetings, and Troutt says, they talk "constantly." But his parents are also enjoying their time at a beach escape in Galveston, Texas, too, the son says.

As with most family dealerships, it has always been a family affair, as his mother used to work as their controller.

## KNOWING THE MARKET

Topper's mostly offers towables — fitting for the business' tagline "Where your outdoor life begins."

"I want to be where you get your first trailer from and your second, third and fourth trailer. Most of these people, you don't just get one. A lot of these customers, they're getting more than one," he says. "We tried motorized; we tried to dip into that — it just didn't work out. It's not something that I can garnish enough attention on. So we're going back to the basics — back to the travel trailers, fifth wheels and some used motorized if it's in the right spot.

"We got a big market to cover … So our focus is entry-level type stuff and really catering to the customer's needs and their service needs as well, making sure they're taken care of."

Troutt says that by and large, it's still families who they see at Topper's, coming in to buy what he says is likely the second or third biggest purchase of their lives.



"They've got their house taken care of, they're comfortable with their bills, they've gotten their nice cars or trucks or whatever they want, and now they're ready to explore with the kids," he says. "I think it's a younger [demographic] — it's my age. I'm 40, [and] I have two kids. I'm the perfect demographic for the RV industry right now."

Troutt says the way he looks at it, most families budget for a car payment for most of their lives. This is like having another car payment.

"I think it's mostly younger families. You'll see trends when storms come in or when the oil fields get cracking. We will get those guys, too. That's starting to pick up, actually, since the election. We're sending a lot of them off to west Texas for drill sites … so it's ever evolving," he says. "But the general consensus right now is mid-30s to mid-40s, families that are breaking into a new hobby."

## MAKING MOVES

Topper's RVs, which employs roughly 18 people, moved around 240 units last year — but Troutt says he's more comfortable in the 400 range.

"That's where I kind of feel like we'll be working back to with the new year here," says Troutt, who spoke with RV PRO in January. "With 2025, 'cautiously optimistic' has been the tale with everybody around the RV industry. I don't think volume's going be a dramatic increase, but I know revenue will.

"We're simply not giving old units away anymore. We've got our inventory flipped as a dealer body nationally … and we can all make money now. And negotiating has come back onto the scene here where it's real selling."

Troutt says the selling mode is no longer that they're giving units away at the lowest price, or just taking orders like they were during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Now we're into real selling again," he says. "You've got to reteach everybody. So now training has been a huge focus for the team here and getting everybody back to the basics and understanding that we are working here … So it's a lot of training this year. I expect to do a lot more training in 2025, but I see the volume increase coming in '26 after this administration can get




in, maybe lower inflation, maybe lower interest rates, maybe lower the daily costs of things.

"And we'll see how these tariffs affect our industry. But it doesn't seem like from the meetings I've been in that the tariffs are going to hit as hard as everybody thinks."

"There's a couple companies that are tied to some people outside this country that I'm sure they'll be able to make adjustments once things come down the table," Troutt continues. "But there's other companies that are already making adjustments and moving domestically, and we'll see which ones move quicker on it when all this unfolds.

"But this is the nature of business. We had them in there before. We all ran our companies the way we needed to when he was in there," Troutt says, referring to the coming and going of different U.S. presidents. "We had to change and adapt when this other administration came in there, and we're going to change and adapt back to the other way. That's how we always do it."

## KEEPING IT PERSONAL

So what sets Topper's RVs apart? Troutt says it's the personal attention he and the staff give to each customer.

"We're going to give you two, three hours, and we're not limited to that. On a walkthrough, we're going to make sure that we sell you the right trailer for your wants and needs," he says. "We want to help you find the right trailer.

"We call our people outfitters — we don't call them salespeople here. ... That's nothing we came up with ... there's no secret sauce, there's no reinventing the wheel or anything like that. We're part of a great 20 Group; we all share great information, marketing tactics and stuff like that."



Troutt says it's all about making sure the customer finds the right thing for what they want and need. And he thinks it's important to not toy around with numbers and make the buying process seamless.

"We don't mess around with the numbers here. We tell you, look, this is where it's at. This is what it's going to be. This is where you said you wanted to be, [and] we're right inside that. Let's do this," Troutt says.

It's also a priority at Topper's to make sure each customer feels prepared before they leave the lot. The dealership crew will verify that a customer knows what to do with the water hoses, dump hoses, and how to turn everything on and off. They're even happy to do a driving lesson if desired.

"That's something that we feel really helps us is spending that time with them, making sure they take the video they want to take, make sure they're comfortable, and then pulling the trailer too," he says. "Maybe that's where we go the extra mile. We show everybody how to hook the trailer up properly, and then we also show them how to set the brake controller properly.

"Anything that makes these people comfortable and feel safe is what we're trying to do at that point."

The follow-up after the sale is just as important, he says. If they don't hear from a customer in 30 days or 60 days after their purchase, the staff at Topper's is going to reach out to see if the customer has used their RV and if they have any questions or adjustments that need to be made.

"The follow-up is very important after that. I think sticking to that with every single customer [is] maybe what sets us apart, but I don't think there's any secret sauce. Everything I'm doing, I've learned from other dealers or other businesspeople."

Offering excellent service is part of what helps Topper's succeed — Troutt says he has sent his techs for training with the RV Technical Institute and feels it was well worth the investment and time. Right now, Topper's has a master-certified tech, one level two and one entry level. He also has a "detail guy," and when the dealership experienced a dip in sales, the service department was able to hold its own.

"That happens in every downturn, really," he says. "These people, they obviously stop buying as [many] new ones, so they're fixing the old ones."

Troutt says he's been lucky to have service technicians who have been with him quite a while; he hasn't had to recruit people as much as other dealers may have had to. He sees the need, however, in getting younger people interested in a career in the RV industry.

"That's what we're trying to get them to understand is that what we have here is a career path, much like HVAC and plumbing and all those other trades out there that these kids want to get into," Troutt says. "Well, the RV tech industry is the same. RV parts is the same. We can create careers where these guys are making six figures for us as long as they're bringing it in." RVP






PHOTO COURTESY OF LIPPERT COMPONENTS

# BEAT THE HEAT:

# A Comprehensive Guide for RV AC Installation & Maintenance

Use these tips and tricks to keep your cool while keeping your rig cool.

**BY MICHAEL HICKS, LIPPERT**

When summer travel kicks into high gear, staying cool on the road becomes a necessity. That's where the right RV air conditioning unit makes a world of difference. A high-capacity RV air conditioner should deliver powerful temperature control while maximizing energy efficiency, but peak performance doesn't happen by accident. RV dealers and owners need to understand that proper preparation, installation and maintenance are crucial for keeping an RV air conditioner running like a dream.

### What To Look for When Choosing an AC Unit

From smaller RVs to even the largest fifth wheels, here are some features that RV owners should seek out:

- **Maximum Cooling With Minimal Power:** A rooftop air conditioner that

is capable of maintaining over 1 ton of cooling power, even in temperatures exceeding 105 F, is ideal. For example, Furrion's Chill Cube 18K has variable speed compressors that make it 50% more efficient than traditional AC units, reducing battery drain and extending generator runtime. This means off-grid adventures can last longer without compromising comfort.

- **Smart Cooling Technology:** Unlike standard ACs that cycle on and off, an AC unit with variable speed compressors continuously adjusts to changing climate conditions. This also ensures a smooth operation that eliminates loud startup noises and prevents power surges that trip breakers.
- **Advanced Air Distribution:** An AC unit with a low-profile air distribution box (ADB) can be designed with a motorized vent for even airflow throughout the RV. Choosing a unit with an oscillating vent spans a wider area compared to conventional models and keeps every corner comfortable.
- **Aerodynamic & Lightweight Design:** The lighter the unit, the better. The Furrion Chill Cube 18K is just over 72 pounds and its aerodynamic rooftop profile reduces drag for better fuel economy and leaves space for solar panels or pop tops.

## Installation: Prep for Success

Proper installation is foundational for optimal performance and the longevity of an AC unit. Here's a step-by-step breakdown of the prep work and installation process, using the Furrion Chill Cube 18K unit as an example:

*1. Turn Off the Power*
Safety first! Disconnect the RV battery, unplug from shore power and turn off any generators before beginning.

*2. Remove the Old AC Unit (If Replacing)*
If replacing an existing unit, unscrew and remove the air distribution box inside the RV. Carefully disconnect electrical wiring and mounting bolts to lift the old unit from the roof. You may need to break the old seal gently.

*3. Position the New Unit*
Place the AC unit over the existing rooftop opening. With the Chill Cube, you should ensure the foam roof gasket aligns perfectly to prevent leaks. Center the unit before moving to the next step.

*4. Install the Mounting Frame*
Inside your RV, dry-fit the mounting frame to check the fit. Install the foam divider between the roof and the air distribution box. Hand-tighten the mounting bolts before evenly tightening them to the specified torque. This will compress the gasket just enough to create a weatherproof seal.

*5. Connect Electrical Wiring*
The new AC unit will come with connectors or a terminal block to help make this step straightforward. Secure any loose wires with clamps and attach the cover to the electrical box.

*6. Attach the Air Distribution Box*
For the Chill Cube, mount the ADB to the frame, securing it with screws. Reconnect control wires and replace the filter and cover.

*7. Power Up & Test*
Restore power and test the unit. Use a remote control or onboard panel to check turbo cool, fan and, with the Chill Cube, the dehumidification modes. If the remote has a "Follow Me" feature, place it where cooling is needed most.

## Essential Maintenance Tips

Regular maintenance ensures that an AC unit stays in top condition. Here are key practices to keep it running smoothly:

*1. Clean or Replace Air Filters*
Dirty filters restrict airflow, reducing performance. Clean washable filters monthly by vacuuming or rinsing with mild detergent and water. Allow filters to air-dry completely before reinstalling. Replace disposable filters as needed.



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*2. Inspect the AC Shroud*
The rooftop shroud protects internal components from debris and weather. Check it twice a year for cracks or brittleness. Replace it promptly if damaged to avoid performance issues.

*3. Check the Roof Seal*
The foam roof gasket between the AC unit and roof prevents leaks. Inspect for wear and ensure it maintains 50% compression. Tighten bolts evenly to avoid overtightening.

*4. Clean the Coils & Fins*
Dirt-covered coils compromise heat exchange efficiency. Use a vacuum with a soft brush attachment to clean coils and straighten bent fins with a fin comb. Avoid using harsh chemicals.

*5. Monitor Electrical Connections*
Over time, wiring connections can become loose. Check for any signs of wear or fraying, and ensure connections remain secure.

As a dealer prepping weekend campers or full-time RVers, investing in the right AC unit means your customer will never have to sweat the summer heat again. The Furrion Chill Cube 18K is one unit that pairs superior technology with smart installation and routine maintenance, maximizing comfort, efficiency and durability. Make the most of a cooling system by following these best practices and keep the journey as cool as the destination. RVP

**Michael Hicks** is the director of engineering for Lippert Components. For more information, visit corporate.lippert.com.

# *Stirring* Things Up

Catch up on the latest kitchen appliance trends with two suppliers.

**BY MICHELE MOORE, RV PRO MANAGING EDITOR**

Some say the kitchen is the heart of a home — and the appliances within it keep things running smoothly. To learn what's new for kitchen appliance trends, RV PRO spoke with RecPro and InVision for insight.

**What are the latest trends in kitchen appliances for RVs?**

**Corey Johnson, senior writer and product researcher, RecPro:** With cookout season approaching, we've noticed an increase in people searching for efficient and compact multifunctional kitchen appliances. These usually include items like cooktop and oven combos or convection microwaves. People want the most effective and easy-to-use appliances for the least amount of space and power consumption.

**Chris Greer, business unit manager, InVision, an Airxcel brand:** Recent trends in RV kitchen appliances emphasize sleek, multifunctional designs that maximize space and efficiency. For example, our 10.7-cubic-foot Dual Swing Door Refrigerator features dual swing hinges, allowing it to open from either side, so it can fit into any RV kitchen layout. Additionally, contemporary finishes and coordinating styles attract RV owners seeking to elevate their kitchen aesthetics without compromising on functionality.

**What have customers been asking for most regarding their kitchen appliances?**

**Johnson:** Our customers seem to be gravitating toward appliances that offer a more "residential" aesthetic or design and look like they'd fit in with a traditional brick-and-mortar home. Especially those that are compatible with solar power. Making an RV look nice and functional is great but being able to make your RV look and feel more like a home is even better.

**Greer:** Customers have always demanded space-saving solutions and high-quality products that fit their RV lifestyle. However, a notable modern trend is the desire for matching kitchen appliances for a coordinated style. At InVision, we recognize this shift and offer high-end, matching kitchen suites that not only maximize space but also enhance the aesthetic appeal of RV kitchens.

**What tech advancements have you seen for RV kitchen appliances recently?**

**Johnson:** We've seen a lot of advancements in RV kitchen hardware lately. Many appliances are now designed to fulfill multiple functions, such as one of our microwaves that also works as a convection oven or air fryer. Many of these multifunctional appliances also double down on efficiency, offering things like eco-modes or solar and battery integration. We've even seen new kitchen appliance designs beginning to integrate smart technology.

**Greer:** Recently, we've seen importance placed on advancements in safety tech




**A RecPro microwave, refrigerator and oven-cooktop combo installed in an RV.** *Photo courtesy of RecPro.*

for RV appliances, not only in new features being developed for safer RV experiences but also the standardization of safety tech in RV appliances. For example, InVision's flame detection technology for our ranges enhances safety by automatically shutting off gas when no flame is detected.

**What products do you offer in the aftermarket?**

**Johnson:** At RecPro, we're all about aftermarket RV parts and the lifestyle that comes with it. That includes things like refrigerators, sinks, faucets, cooktops, ovens, microwaves and backsplashes. Some of our more popular aftermarket RV parts that don't include kitchen stuff would be our low-noise air conditioners, powered and manual awnings, and our Charles line of modular furniture.

**Greer:** InVision presents a collection of RV appliances that blend multifunctional designs with modern aesthetics, including innovative refrigerators, versatile ranges, sleek hood vents, efficient washers and dryers, and advanced water pumps.

**How do you work with dealers or customers to help them install your aftermarket products?**

**Johnson:** We make continual efforts to improve our written installation guides and manuals using feedback from sources like our customer reviews, customer Q&A, customer service team and more. We take that feedback, identify where people are encountering difficulties or confusion and use that information to better explain or simplify the installation process. Recently, we've also been doing a lot more instructional and installation-type videos for our YouTube channel so customers can physically see how a product is used or installed.

**Greer:** As part of the Airxcel family, InVision offers customers access to a network of dealers and service centers nationwide through the Airxcel Dealer & Service Center Locator: airxcel.com/service-locator.

**Do you recommend any maintenance for these appliances, and if so, do you offer maintenance/repair training to dealers?**

**Johnson:** Maintenance can vary from appliance to appliance, so we can't give any specific recommendations. The only maintenance we can recommend for any appliance is following the maintenance instructions found in the manual or as stated by the manufacturer. Currently, we do not offer maintenance or repair training to dealers.

**Greer:** As with any appliance, a comprehensive care routine should include regular inspection, cleaning and maintenance. Detailed instructions for routine maintenance and care are provided in our Installation, Operation and User Guide.

**What are some of the challenges that dealers or customers may face with their kitchen appliances, and what would be your advice for them?**

**Johnson:** A big challenge for most customers and dealers is the limited space available in an RV in combination with power usage. The best bit of advice we can give to people looking for new appliances is to measure carefully and measure twice [and] look for appliances that are designed to be compact. Multifunctional appliances will usually fit the bill, and with the benefit of serving more than one purpose, you're only taking up space with one appliance instead of two. The last bit of advice is to be aware of the power requirements of your appliance and how that will impact the power limitations of your RV. Try to prioritize appliances that offer low wattage, energy-saving modes or ones that are compatible with 12-volt DC or solar power.

**Greer:** Dealerships and customers often face challenges such as limited space for appliances and the need for energy efficiency. Additionally, compatibility issues with power sources can arise.



**InVision's 10.7-cubic-foot Dual Swing Door Refrigerator.** *Photo courtesy of InVision.*

My advice is to prioritize compact, multifunctional appliances that maximize utility while fitting within space constraints. We also believe that the after-sales service is a very important aspect and pride ourselves in working with OEMs, dealerships and end users to provide the best experience possible.

**Is there anything else our readers should know about kitchen appliances for RVs?**

**Johnson:** Just be sure to thoroughly research the appliance you want, no matter who you purchase it from. Also, when you're shopping for an appliance of any kind, it's important to keep your RV's limitations in mind, such as its available power and space. You wouldn't want to end up purchasing a new gadget just to discover that your RV doesn't have the space for it or can't supply enough power. Keeping the limitations of your RV in mind before you commit to a purchase will help you know if an appliance will work for your particular setup or if you might need to make some modifications to your RV.

**Greer:** At InVision, we are always working on innovation, so be on the lookout for the latest appliances to help you build the best RV. RVP

# RUNNING THE BUSINESS SUPER SECTION

Learn more about RV insurance, DMS, working with anxious customers, protecting yourself from data breaches and other tips to help your business prosper in 2025.




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# NAVIGATING THE ROAD OF RV INSURANCE: PROTECTING YOUR CUSTOMERS' HOME ON WHEELS

## Four tips for finding the right RV insurance coverage.

**By Adam Ruri, Comparion Insurance Agency, a Liberty Mutual Company**

Large-scale weather events around the country are a stark reminder of the power of nature, as well as protecting what matters most. The Brookings Institute recently reported that climate-related insurance claims are on the rise with "wind and hail, water damage and freezing, and fire and lightning" being the "leading causes of property damage."

Despite being able to drive or pull an RV away from immediate harm, the RV insurance market is not immune to weather-related impacts and macroeconomic trends. When you are offering a customer a home on wheels, RV owners need to understand key coverages that indemnify them for physical damages to the vehicle, like an auto policy or liability exposure similar to a home policy.

Once you've helped your customer settle on the perfect RV, understanding coverages and buying RV insurance can be complicated and costly. Licensed, local independent insurance agents help consumers compare coverage across multiple carriers countrywide. It's important to partner with an insurance agent that will help RV owners make the best protection decision. The best independent insurance agents can demystify insurance coverages or highlight risks that might require special endorsements, which could increase or decrease insurance premiums.

But what exactly are we buying when we pay an insurance premium? Indemnification.

Insurance carriers are paid to deliver upon a legal agreement with their policyholders to provide indemnification. Said another way, the promise of any type of insurance is a commitment to financial protection and compensation for covered losses or harm. Yet insurance remains a mystery to most of us who are shelling out more and more each year in premiums.

"Because insurance protects people's most important assets, it's crucial that policyholders understand their coverage. But unfortunately, our survey shows there is a considerable insurance knowledge gap among consumers," said Charles Symington, president and CEO of the Independent Insurance Agents of America (Big "I").

According to a study released last year by Trusted Choice and the Big "I," "while 86% of respondents said they had a strong understanding of what their policies covered, when their knowledge was put to the test many were incorrect or unsure about coverage specifics."

Coverage specifics for RV owners are even more nuanced, when you consider limitations on personal storage solutions and exposure to the weather.

"I think one thing that we have to be cognizant of is climate change and weather in general," said Christopher Bartram, Safeco's national specialty vehicle product director "Given the size of RVs, they are typically not garaged in the same way an auto would be. Therefore, the exposure to weather risk is also more pronounced than a regular car."

Protecting an RV from the elements is easier said than done, especially as market growth and demand for RVs and storage solutions rebounds. According to Business Research Insights, "density in cities has affected the availability of individual facilities for storage, and as such owners are compelled to look for professional services to secure their property against vices such as theft, damage or even deterioration due to unfavorable weather conditions." Where someone garages an RV can be a factor in what they pay to insurance carriers.

No matter where an RV is stored, finding the right RV insurance coverage in this market could be a challenge. Here are four tips:

1. **If your customer is not a full-timer, they should make sure the RV policy allows for peer-to-peer rentals.** The "median annual usage for current RV owners remains steady at 20 days," so RVs sit unused for an average of 340+ days each year, which has given rise to the RV peer-to-peer sharing economy. With the advent of Outdoorsy, RVshare and RVezy, this is becoming more prevalent, and not all insurance carriers allow RV owners to rent out their RV. Meaning, although most RV rental companies offer insurance coverage during the rental



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period, some insurance policies may prohibit this type of RV use. If your customer wants to rent out their RV, they should be covered before, during and after the rental period.

2. **Save time and find an independent insurance agent who can shop RV insurance for the owner.** Typically, binding insurance coverage online or directly with a single insurance carrier means that the agent on the other side of the phone or computer screen is a captive agent — representing just one insurance company. Independent insurance agents or brokers represent multiple RV insurance carriers and, once they collect all relevant information, can compare RV insurance policy features and benefits for your customer's specific RV and insurance history. This helps consumers find the right coverage at the right price. And hopefully helps make insurance a little easier to understand in the process.
3. If a customer is like "most Americans who do not fully understand insurance coverage," **ask an insurance agent to explain features, benefits or RV-specific endorsements offered by the policies available to him or her.** For example, some carriers offer endorsements for vacation liability, for damages to the RV sustained in Mexico, for personal effects or, in case of a total loss, choosing an agreed-upon value or replacement cost option upfront. Safeco's Bartram says of their ability to offer different settlement options: "Selecting the right settlement option can guarantee you could get the next best model if something were to happen to your RV." This also allows the carrier to price the insurance product accordingly.
4. **Know what you're paying for.** When I began my insurance career, someone once told me, "Insurance is one of the most expensive things people pay for that they know very little about." Insurance is a financial protection product, not a maintenance policy. If an RV is in need of repairs due to regular use or wear and tear, chances are the insurance policy will not cover those repair costs. However, if another vehicle, or an animal, hits an RV while your customer is visiting Yellowstone Park, for example, submitting a claim to the insurance company will start the process of verifying the loss and ensuring the customer is paid what they are owed.

Successfully navigating the sometimes winding road of RV insurance is more than just paying a monthly insurance premium. A home on wheels is a lifestyle choice and an investment in freedom and adventure. Making sure that investment is protected from unexpected risks, whether on the road or in storage, is an important responsibility.

By partnering with knowledgeable independent insurance agents and understanding specific coverages, RV owners can safeguard their investments and focus on enjoying their journeys. With a "record 11.2 million RV owning households" and "an incredible 9.6 million households intend[ing] to buy an RV within the next five years," that's a lot of investments and journeys that need protection. Make sure your customers partner with the right agent to help find the right RV coverage. RVP

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# HOW TO GO FROM CRM TO DMS

## Bring all of your dealership's departments under one roof.

**By Lightspeed**



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In today's RV world, managing just customer relationships isn't enough; your dealership needs a system that brings everything together, making your business run like a well-oiled machine. While CRMs (customer relationship management tools) are great for tracking leads and keeping up with customer conversations, they don't cover all the bases as your dealership grows. That's where a dealer management solution (DMS) comes in, as it can be a more connected solution to help your dealership thrive.

### What Does a CRM Do?

CRMs are designed to help you stay on top of customer interactions and keep everyone happy. They organize data, track leads and keep your team connected with customers to improve relationships and boost sales. However, CRMs often fall short when it comes to other parts of running a dealership, like inventory tracking, accounting and service. This is when a DMS is needed.

### What's a DMS & Why Do Dealerships Need It?

Think of a DMS as a tool that brings every part of your dealership into one place. It doesn't just handle customer relationships — it connects departments like inventory, accounting, parts and service into one system that helps everyone stay on the same page and work more efficiently.

### Key Benefits of a DMS

1. **Complete Business Integration —** A DMS pulls the whole dealership together, linking sales, inventory, service and accounting. When your departments use the same up-to-date information, decision-making gets faster and more accurate. For instance, your service team can check inventory instantly, and your sales team can quickly access customer histories, creating smoother operations.
2. **Smart Inventory Management —** Managing inventory is essential, but a CRM won't cover all the bases. A DMS lets you monitor new and used RVs, parts and accessories in real time, making it easy to keep stock levels where they need to be. It's like having a super-organized inventory assistant that helps keep sales humming along.
3. **Easy Finance & Insurance (F&I) Handling —** F&I can be complicated, but a DMS brings it all together in one place. Credit checks, loan applications and insurance offers can all be handled within the DMS, helping close deals faster and offering customers an easier, smoother experience.
4. **Better Service & Parts Coordination —** For RV dealerships, service and parts are big players. A DMS makes it simple to manage both by integrating service scheduling, technician assignments and parts inventory in one spot. Technicians get instant access to vehicle histories, and the parts team can stay on top of stock levels, leading to faster repairs and fewer delays.
5. **Powerful Reporting & Insights —** A DMS goes beyond CRM reports, providing insights across all parts of your dealership. Whether it's sales trends, inventory needs or service performance, a DMS shows you what's working (and what's not) so you can make smarter decisions.
6. **Boosted Customer Experience —** A CRM is great for managing leads, but a DMS covers the whole customer journey. By making customer info accessible to everyone, a DMS ensures every team member — from service to sales — has the latest information. The result is a more personalized, streamlined experience for customers.

### Ready To Evolve?

Moving from a CRM to a DMS can be the upgrade that takes your dealership to the next level, helping you manage everything under one roof. By bringing departments together, a DMS helps dealerships run smoother, work smarter and keep customers coming back for more. For long-term success, evolving to a DMS is a smart step forward. RVP

# TRUST BUT VERIFY

**Best practices for preventing internal fraud in dealerships.**

**By Erik Forbes & Jane Saxon, CBIZ**




IMAGE COURTESY OF CBIZ

**The Fraud Triangle illustrates how an employee may be at increased risk of stealing from their employer.**

**"My employee would never steal from me! He/She has been a loyal employee for 10 years and is like part of the family!"**

This statement is the most common rebuttal we hear when an act of internal fraud or theft is discovered. When presented with the evidence, the dealer not only has to process that they have been a victim of a crime but also questions their intuition and how they misplaced trust. Furthermore, the employee is typically a "model employee" that will be hard to replace.

Unfortunately, internal fraud is a serious threat to all business owners and poses significant risks to dealerships. An act of internal fraud can undermine the financial stability of the dealership, disrupt operational efficiency and erode trust among employees while diminishing company culture.

Recent reports indicate that approximately 84% of dealerships experience some form of internal fraud. It is estimated that the typical organization loses approximately 5% of its revenues each year to fraud. Five percent of revenue in a dealership may be unlikely, but 5% of gross profit is not, which still amounts to a significant amount of money. The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners estimates the median loss per fraud incident to be $145,000 before it is discovered. So, how do dealers prevent this from happening? By understanding what it is, why it happens and how it happens, dealerships can put controls in place to minimize the opportunities.

## What Is Internal Fraud?

Internal fraud refers to unethical activities committed by employees, such as embezzlement, falsified records and unauthorized transactions.

## Why Does It Occur?

The Fraud Triangle is a well-known model that illustrates why an employee may be at increased risk of stealing from their employer. When the three components — pressure, opportunity and rationalization — converge, an employee is at higher risk of committing internal fraud.

- Pressure: Personal lifestyle creep, medical or other financial stresses are common pressures that motivate internal fraud.
- Opportunity: The employee has access or lack of oversight that allows the opportunity to commit the fraudulent acts.
- Rationalization: The employee justifies why they are committing the fraud. Common examples include: no one will notice, the employee deserves it, they are a long-time employee of the dealership or perhaps they see it as a short-term loan that they will pay back.

## What Can Dealers Do?

Of the three conditions listed above, the employer cannot exert considerable influence or control over the outside pressure or rationalization components. However, they can control the opportunity component by implementing proper internal controls, oversight and fraud determent programs.

Each department in the dealership faces unique risks when it comes to limiting internal fraud and requires unique controls and oversight.

## Accounting Department

The accounting department is a frequent target for fraud due to the inherent risks as employees deal directly with financial transactions. Therefore, internal controls and oversight within this department are essential.

- Segregation of duties: Divide tasks among multiple employees so no single person can initiate, authorize and record transactions. For example, the employee handling cash deposits should not complete the daily cash reconciliations.
- Reconciliations: Conduct regular account reconciliations to identify discrepancies, which should be investigated. For higher risk accounts, we recommend more frequent reconciliations. For example, we recommend reconciling your cash accounts daily.




- Cross-training of employees: Cross-training allows for operational efficiencies during employee absences and provides a second set of eyes on critical roles.
- Mandatory vacations: Requiring employees to take vacations ensures their duties are temporarily performed by others, potentially uncovering irregularities.

### Sales Department

Internal fraud in the sales department often involves selling phantom products or falsifying loan documents. Controls to mitigate fraud in the sales department include:

- Regular audits: Conducting regular audits of inventory, deal jackets and sales practices to detect irregularities.
- Transparent communication: Ensure customers understand pricing and service options so that they understand what they are purchasing and avoid confusion during the sales process.
- Anonymous reporting: Implement mechanisms that allow employees to report unethical behavior safely and anonymously without the fear of any repercussions. This will cultivate a culture of integrity and self-monitoring.

### F&I Department

The F&I department faces challenges such as loan markup fraud, warranty scams and phantom labor charges. Recommended controls include:

- Automated systems: Use technology to flag inconsistent loan terms or excessive markups.
- Ethical compensation structures: Avoid high-pressure sales incentives that encourage unethical behavior.
- Compliance training: Educate employees on regulations and the consequences of fraud.

### Service Department

Common types of fraud in service operations include inflated labor hours, theft of parts and duplicate warranty claims. Preventative controls include:

- Segregation of duties: Separate the tasks between the employee who diagnose the service work and the employee in charge of invoicing the customer.
- Random inspections: Conduct random checks of work orders and inventory to detect discrepancies.
- Customer feedback: Encourage feedback to verify services rendered and uncover issues.

### Parts Department

The parts department is vulnerable to theft, unauthorized inventory adjustments and inflated pricing. Controls to deter fraud include:

- Inventory reconciliations: Conduct regular internal reconciliations as well as third-party audits.
- Access restrictions: Limit access to inventory systems to necessary employees and require approvals for returns or discounts.

### What Are the Symptoms & Indicators of Internal Fraud?

Even with strong controls, fraud can still occur. As an owner, be on the lookout for the below indicators increasingly associated with fraudulent activity:

- Messy accounting: Look for incomplete records, large journal entries by CPAs at year-end or frequent discrepancies during account reconciliations. Pay attention to discrepancies.
- Customer complaints: Monitor for confusion over service costs, billing errors or overcharges.
- Unusual employee behavior: Be alert to employees working odd hours, resisting questions or displaying defensiveness.

### How Do I Respond if I Suspect Fraud Is Occurring?

In the unfortunate circumstances that internal fraud is suspected or detected, we recommend a dealer immediately act with the following steps:

1. Containment: Restrict the employee access to systems, freeze suspicious accounts and secure documentation related to the suspected fraud.
2. Contact professionals: Immediately notify your CPA, legal counsel, insurers and local authorities.
3. Quantify dollar impact: Work with the professionals to quantify the dollar impact for insurance reimbursement and potential retribution, as well as potential tax deductions.
4. Review and improve internal controls: Evaluate how the fraud occurred, and review and improve internal controls to eliminate the opportunity for the internal fraud to reoccur.

### Creating a Fraud-Resistant Culture

The foundation of fraud prevention lies in fostering a culture of integrity. Dealerships must have internal controls and training, encourage open communication and ensure employees feel safe reporting concerns. By embracing the principles of "Trust but Verify," dealerships can safeguard operations, protect financial health and maintain trust with employees and customers. RVP

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**Jane Saxon** leads the national CBIZ dealership team, which serves clients across all dealership platforms, including RV dealerships. Her expertise is providing innovative tax strategy, advisory services and planning that aligns with the current economic environment, thereby improving the profitability and value of the dealership and owner wealth.

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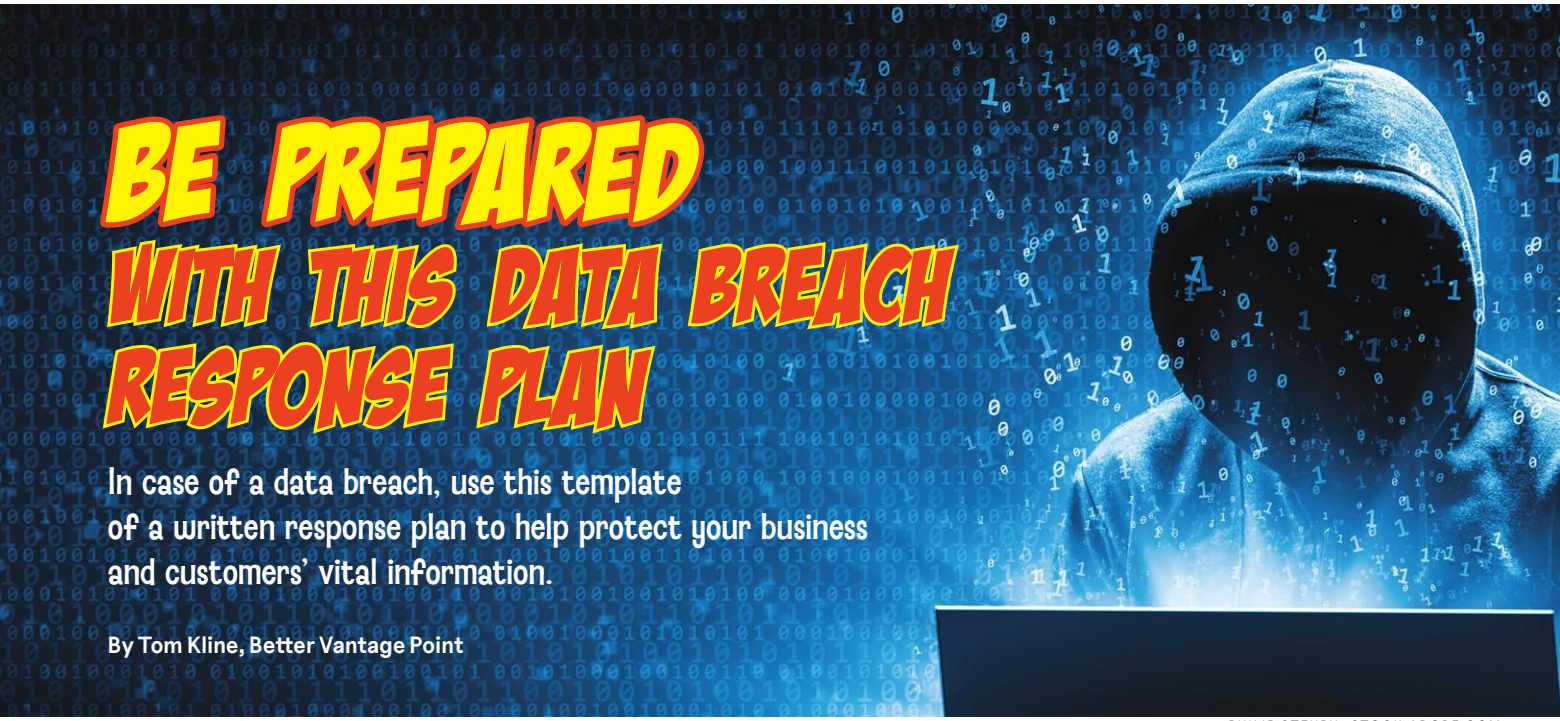



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# BE PREPARED WITH THIS DATA BREACH RESPONSE PLAN



**In case of a data breach, use this template of a written response plan to help protect your business and customers' vital information.**

By Tom Kline, Better Vantage Point

PHILIP STEURY- STOCK.ADOBE.COM

As a business owner/dealer, you have an obligation to protect customers' personal information. This is called personally identifiable information (PII) and includes names, addresses, Social Security numbers and dates of birth.

If your dealership does not currently have cyberinsurance, please consider it now. Dealers are constantly getting phishing emails. From a risk perspective, statistics show that it's not if you are going to get an attack — it's when. Many dealers receive threats on a daily basis.

Consider having a written corporate data breach response plan so all employees know what to do in case of a detected or known breach. Employees should be trained on cybersecurity regularly, which should include discussions on password protection, phishing and other issues related to keeping this vital information away from the bad guys. Here is a sample written plan to use as a basis or template for your company:

- o If you suspect a breach, contact _____ (owner or general manager) immediately at _____ (insert cell number)
- o _____ will contact the cyberinsurance carrier immediately
- o Move quickly to secure the systems and fix vulnerabilities that may have caused the breach
- o Stop additional losses by taking all affected equipment offline immediately
- o Do not turn any machines off until insurance company forensic experts arrive
- o If possible, put clean machines online in place of affected ones
- o Update credentials and passwords of all authorized users (if a hacker stole credentials, the system will remain vulnerable until the company changes credentials, even if the hacker's tools have been removed)
- o Remove improperly posted information from the web, including websites
- o If the data breach involved personal information improperly posted on the web, the company will immediately remove it
- o Be aware that search engines store or "cache" information for a period of time
- o Contact the search engines to ensure they don't archive personal information posted in error
- o Search for the company's exposed data to make sure that no other websites have saved a copy. If you find any, contact those sites and ask them to remove it
- o Ensure staff knows to forward any information that may aid the investigation to _____ (owner or GM)
- o Document the investigation
- o Do not destroy any forensic evidence during the investigation and remediation
- o The company will create a comprehensive communication plan that reaches all affected audience
- o No one should be authorized to discuss any of this with the public, including:
  - Making misleading statements about the breach
  - Withholding key details that might help consumers protect themselves and their information
  - Publicly sharing information that might put consumers at further risk

- o If this happens, the company should anticipate questions people may ask
- o The company will notify appropriate law enforcement
- o If names and Social Security numbers have been stolen, the company will contact the major credit bureaus
- o If the compromise involves a large group of people, the company will advise the credit bureaus. If the company recommends people request fraud alerts and credit freezes for their files, here is the contact information for the three major bureaus:
  - Equifax: equifax.com or 800-525-6285
  - Experian: experian.com or 888-397-3742
  - TransUnion: transunion.com or 800-680-7289

- o People whose Social Security numbers have been stolen should contact the credit bureaus themselves to request fraud alerts and credit freezes
- o In addition, people whose Social Security numbers have been stolen should contact the IRS Identity Protection Specialized Unit at 800-908-4490
- o In concert with the cyberinsurance carrier, the company will notify individuals quickly that personal information has been compromised so they can take steps to reduce the chance their information will be misused. In deciding who to notify, and how, the company will consider:
  - The nature of the compromise
  - The type of information taken
  - The likelihood of misuse
  - The potential damage if the information is misused

- o When notifying individuals, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recommends:
  - The company consult with law enforcement about the timing of the notification so it does not impede with their investigation
  - _____ (owner or GM) will be the point of contact for releasing information. No one else is authorized to do so
  - If the company does not have contact information for the affected individuals, it will consider how to contact them
  - Note what happened, how it happened, what information was taken, how the thieves used the information, what actions have been taken to remedy the situation and what actions are being taken to protect individuals, such as offering free credit monitoring services

- o Also, refer to identitytheft.gov/databreach for information on appropriate follow-up steps after a compromise, depending on the type of personal information that was exposed



- Ensure the affected customers know how the company will contact them in the future. For example, if the company will only contact them by mail, it will communicate that
- The company will consider telling customers that updates will be posted on a specific part of the website, which will give customers a place they can go at any time to see the latest information. This will save time by reducing phone calls

I understand the company's Data Breach Response Plan and will adhere to it. If I have any questions, I will contact _____.

_____
_____
Printed Name
Signature

Date of training: _____



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Consider implementing a protocol to safeguard your dealership against any issues proactively. I also recommend that you review this resource from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC): ftc.gov/system/files/documents/plain-language/pdf-0136_proteting-personal-information.pdf. RVP

**Tom Kline**, a former dealership owner with 30 years of experience, specializes in solving dealership problems through risk mitigation remedies, compliance and dealership dispute desolation. Kline is lead consultant and founder of Better Vantage Point and has worked with publicly held and private dealerships. He is an endorsed expert for the RVDA, VIADA, CIADA and Dealership Marketing Magazine.

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# CREATING A SUCCESSFUL RV SHOW BRAND PRESENCE

## A guide to common problems brands face and how to avoid them.

By Scott & Vanessa Russell




PHOTO COURTESY OF SCOTT & VANESSA RUSSELL

RV shows offer a unique opportunity to connect intimately with future buyers and customers who are ready to purchase. While some dealerships and RV manufacturers diligently plan to capitalize on this sales opportunity, others have room for improvement. Here is an explanation of many common mistakes, plus ideas on improving your brand presence at RV shows.

### PROBLEM NO. 1: Insufficient RV Model Information

One of the most common issues is the lack of easily accessible information about RV models. Customers often have to hunt for the model number and price, and key standout features that make a particular manufacturer unique are often not highlighted. If a customer is touring a model that has specific build features that make the unit unique, it is frustrating if there isn't any information provided about these features.

### Solutions for Problem No. 1:

- Ensure that basic model information, especially length and weight, is readily available for customers to find.
- Provide printed handouts with model information, allowing customers to take them home to help remember the layout and features.



PHOTO BY MICHELE MOORE

- Include QR codes on all materials, linking to the model specifications page or the model page on the dealership's website for quick access. This provides additional information and allows customers to compare the show pricing with regular dealership pricing.
- Highlight what makes a brand or specific model unique by placing signs directly on features that draw attention, such as a pullout pantry, trash can storage, motion sensor lighting or hidden storage.

## PROBLEM NO. 2: Untrained Sales Staff

Another issue is that sometimes customers know more about the units than employees. RV shows frequently showcase newly released models, which can further contribute to the staff's lack of knowledge. Sales staff may struggle to showcase distinguishing model features effectively without a way to verify or look up model information quickly. It's beneficial to have staff available to demonstrate convertible features, which are key selling factors but not always intuitive to the customer.

At the 2024 Florida RV Show, ATC Trailers stood out with knowledgeable employees who demonstrated convertible features as well as what makes ATC a quality standout. Signage posted around the exterior of models provided in-depth features and brand information.

In contrast, a veteran travel trailer brand missed an opportunity by not having a dedicated show employee present to demonstrate a folding and setup process. While this brand offers one-of-a-kind engineering, there was a lack of signs and marketing materials showcasing its unique features or communicating why buyers should choose this brand.

### Solutions for Problem No. 2:

- Provide training on new models before the show.
- Use QR codes that lead to model specifications for easy and quick information access for both customers and employees.
- Create a quick reference employee document listing the show models and their standout features.
- Ensure that an employee is available to demonstrate convertible features.
- Treat industry days like regular RV show days, putting your best

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brand foot forward with information displays and properly trained staff during media presence. This can result in additional positive exposure in content produced prior to the show's official opening.

### PROBLEM NO. 3: Sales Staff Using Tour Units as a Mobile Office

Despite often having designated tent areas with tables for employees to meet with buyers and work during the show, employees are often found sitting in RVs on phones or computers or visiting with each other in RVs open for tours. These employees aren't greeting or helping customers, creating an unprofessional atmosphere similar to taking a home tour with the owner sitting on the couch.

#### Solutions for Problem No. 3:

If employees aren't showcasing unit features or helping customers, having them in another location is more professional.

### PROBLEM NO. 4: RV Units Needing Repair

Keeping units in top shape with a high traffic volume of RV tours can be challenging, but nothing looks worse than brand-new units already broken on the showroom floor. Believe it or not, this is often seen at RV shows, and it's a considerable buyer turnoff.

#### Solutions for Problem No. 4:

- Consider having a team on-site ready to address unit repairs as needed daily throughout the show.
- It's better to pull a unit from tours than to showcase a new unit in disrepair and create quality concerns.

### PROBLEM NO. 5: Not Promoting Show Special Pricing

Many shoppers mistakenly believe they have to buy the display model. Not all buyers are comfortable purchasing a show display, which can be a deal breaker. There is also often a lack of information and urgency communicated regarding show special pricing.

#### Solution for Problem No. 5:

- Increase team sales communications training regarding incentives to buy during the show versus after.

### PROBLEM NO. 6: Not Creating a Buzz To Draw Customers Into Your Display Area

Have you considered what makes people want to stop in your dealership/manufacturer area versus others at the



show? Don't make the mistake of having a boring, lackluster display and presence.

### Solutions for Problem No. 6:

- Create a fun, upbeat, party-like atmosphere with music, photo props or photo displays that grab the attention of people who may otherwise keep walking by.
- Host contests or offer free giveaways such as rain ponchos, shopping bags, drink cozies and T-shirts. Consider placing a larger freebie deep within your display area so people have to walk all the way through to grab it.
- Set up camping atmosphere displays outside of RV models, including camping chairs, faux fires and yard games to help buyers visualize how it would feel to go camping in this RV.
- Draw additional traffic to your show area by hosting camping influencer meet-and-greets or by providing RVing informational seminars.

RV shows offer a valuable opportunity to connect with potential customers, both those ready to make an immediate purchase and those considering a future investment. By addressing the common mistakes outlined in this article and implementing the solutions, dealerships and manufacturers can capitalize on this chance to showcase their products, engage with customers and ultimately drive sales. Remember, the key to success at RV shows is creating an inviting, informative and memorable experience for attendees. With proper planning, staff training and attention to detail, your brand can stand out from the competition and leave a lasting impression on buyers. RVP




**Scott and Vanessa Russell** have RV traveled full-time with their daughter since 2015. They work from the road as RV industry marketing consultants, writers for magazines and websites, social media ad creators/influencers, television contributors for RVing Today and product/lifestyle photographers. Contact them at scott@theadventuredetour.com, on their blog theadventuredetour.com or on Instagram @theadventuredetour.






# WIN OVER THE CUSTOMER FIRST

**How to handle an anxious customer who may be wary of salespeople.**

There is one scenario at RV dealerships that might be at the heart of losing more deals than any I have seen recently, and one that is also overlooked in salesperson training. That's how to deal with customer anxiety.

There is one question that comes to mind in trying to determine a solution to this problem: Is buying logical or emotional?

Buying an RV involves spending money, so some might feel that it's logical. However, that only makes sense if you assume that customers think with their head and not their heart when it comes to spending.

For the highly analytical customer, buying is a logical, fact-based decision. However, that's only a small portion of RV buyers today. Most customers buy with their eyes and with their heart, which is driven by emotion.

RVs aren't cheap these days, and parting ways with thousands of dollars of hard-earned money is difficult for many people to justify. When you add high interest rates for finance buyers during the last few years, it can raise the tension level for most customers when buying something that is a luxury and not a necessity.

In addition, at some point most customers have worked with at least one aggressive, pushy salesperson, who is highly motivated for a sale and is willing to do almost anything to get one, including falsely answering questions or giving inaccurate information. When customers finally sit down with a salesperson who is desperate to prove they're knowledgeable and competent, they will have to tolerate them talking way more then they listen, which turns the customer off even more.

What does this cause? What's the result of all this? The typical customer will walk into your dealership with a great deal of anxiety, nervousness, tension and apprehension. Many are actually scared to work with a salesperson (even though they know they need one) and will use creative tactics to avoid working with one. When approached by a salesperson to ask if they need assistance, we have all heard the typical response "I'm just looking."

The real issue here is that very few salespeople have had any training to identify a nervous, anxious customer and even less on how to handle it when they are faced with one. So their typical response is to rush them out in the lot to look at product, thinking that will calm their nerves and make everything all better. In the short term, that can help — but there is one big thing missing: winning the customer first by calming tension, achieving comfort and laying the groundwork to build trust.

I can't tell you how many times I have seen a salesperson seemingly do everything right in matching the product with a customer's wants, needs and budget, only to fail in trying to close the sale. Customers tend to quickly utter their famous last words: "I want to go home and think about it." And off they go with no RV. This is an instinctive response, and often customers have no idea what they want to go home and think about. They're just not comfortable.

What many salespeople miss is that when a customer walks in with high anxiety from all the things mentioned above, it must be recognized and addressed or that negative mindset will linger throughout the entire process, making it impossible for them to say "yes" when the salesperson tries to close the sale.

Yet, time and time again, the typical salesperson believes that diverting their customers' attention by getting them into a beautiful RV will make everything go away and they will feel fine again. So how can salespeople avoid this reaction? Every salesperson must win the customer first, before moving on to any second step, and here's a few steps to help do that.

## Slow Down the Early Process

Don't be in a hurry right after the initial greeting. Slow things down in those



**Thomas Morin** is a sales coach and author in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, who teaches salespeople in all industries how to build the rapport and trust that customers must feel to be comfortable buying. Listen to Morin's podcast "No Trust, No Sale" on Spotify, iTunes and Amazon. Contact Morin at bookauthorcoach@gmail.com.

first few minutes to allow the anxious customer to catch their breath and develop an initial impression of you. They also need to be convinced that you are listening to them, which is a high priority for any customer. Listen to what the customer is really saying but also how they're saying it, which will give you time to read the nonverbal cues they are giving you to confirm what you're hearing verbally. You also need to read between the lines to confirm that there is no discomfort or anxiety before moving onto the next step. Your gut feeling needs to confirm what you're hearing.

## Address Discomfort Directly but Softly

If a customer appears nervous or uneasy, ask them about it in a caring, curious, nonthreatening manner. You can do so simply by asking "Are you OK?" In most cases, they will want to tell you about a horrible experience with another salesperson, just to get it off their chest. When they do, listen carefully, because they will tell you exactly what they don't want you to do when working with them.

## Get Permission for Each Next Step

A nervous, anxious customer will have an imaginary fear that you might try to "pull something on them." They will likely fear this because of what a previous salesperson has tried to get past them.

Let the customer know what you plan to do next, and why, and confirm their agreement by "sound good?" Then move on to the next step.

## Get the Information You Need

You can ask what they want, why they want it, how they plan to use it and pay for it, only after you're convinced they have relaxed and tension has eased. If you ask for this too soon, you will not get an honest portrayal of what they want and why they want it, wasting time showing them things that don't fit them — a surefire deal killer.

## Don't Rush To Look at RVs

The nervous, anxious customer will want to rush right out and look at product. This is a diversion tactic designed to focus on product and avoid you, even if you did nothing wrong (it's likely because of a bad experience at another dealership). If you take this bait and get them into product before they feel comfort and trust with you, you have removed the opportunity to earn that trust. Pushing back in a nonthreatening way to slow them down a bit is what I call the "30 seconds of discomfort," where you need to be assertive to slow them down enough to allow time to get to know, trust and feel safe with you.

## Be a Dove With Steel Talons

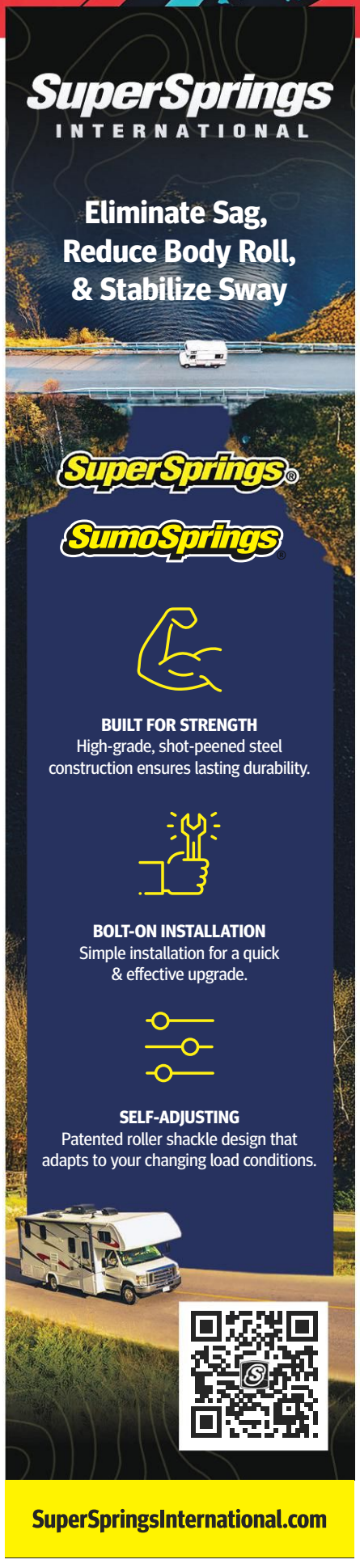
The moment mentioned above is where most salespeople lose control of their customer, because the customer is allowed to dictate activities, tempo and what you do next. Politely push back and explain why you to need more information before you go look at product. If they appear stressed, ask about it openly, with a concerned, caring approach by saying something like "I'm sensing that you're a bit anxious or uncomfortable, and I'm here to help you relax and enjoy your time with me today. Before we look at the RV that's perfect for you, let's talk about how I can help you be more comfortable. Sound good?"

When they answer, be sure to take notes. But first, let them know what you're writing and why — so you can remember everything that was important to them and handle yourself accordingly.

## Ask for Permission First

For each following step, announce what you would like to do first, and ask for permission (and continue to do so). This eliminates any fear of you surprising them. Once you do this three or four times, they will trust you are there to help them.

The cumulative effect of these steps will help to relax their anxiety and will lay the groundwork for the trust they must have to make the emotion-based decision to buy. RVP



# THE 5 STEPS OF FINANCES



NONGASIMO- STOCK.ADOBE.COM

This month's column focuses on the financial aspects of managing your parts and accessories operations.

So that we are on the same page in regard to the financial aspects of your parts and accessories operations — and of each of your departments — I will explain the "Five Steps of Finances."

These five steps are:

Sales (-) Cost of Sales = Gross Profit (-) Expenses = Net Profit or Loss

As you can see, it is important to control expenses to realize as much net profit from the gross profit as possible because if expenses are too high, then the bottom line is a loss.

At this point, some of you might be asking:

## How To Control Expenses?

Can we agree that personnel are an expense? Could we also agree that if you could achieve more efficiency from your personnel, this might be a form of expense control?

Allow me an explanation: If your parts associates could process each sales transaction more efficiently, then could each of them possibly process more sales transactions? This could possibly add to the sales (Step 1 of the 5). With personnel expense fixed (Step 4) because you haven't added any parts associates, then with the increased gross profit (Step 3) you would have a corresponding increase to the net profit (Step 5).

Perhaps you are now asking:

## How To Increase Employee Efficiency?

As with most of Selway's Suggestions, there is some effort required to accomplish this, and that could be in developing detailed written procedures (DWP).

DWP incorporate at least two methods of increasing parts associates' efficiency, and these are:

- Providing a documented set of steps for performing a process
- Training parts associates in the established procedures for performing a process

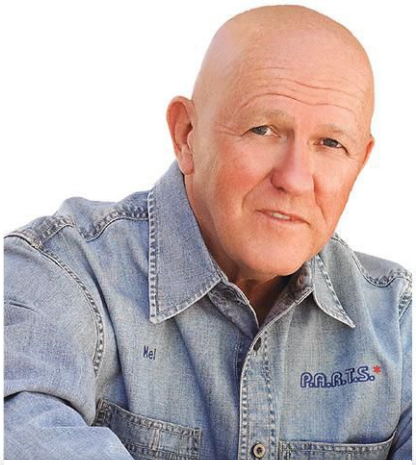
By developing DWP for most (preferably all) of your operational routines and by training your parts associates in the efficient, consistent processing of these routines, you minimize the chance for an error. By minimizing these error opportunities, you therefore reduce the chances that an associate will have to perform the same operation again — a "redo" as some in our industry term them.

The reduction/elimination of redo's increases the efficiency of your parts associates, which opens the door for added transactions. It also enhances your customer service performance because the customer has a positive experience. "Doing it right the first time" could increase your customer loyalty and therefore your opportunity for additional sales.

Maybe some of you have already implemented DWP in your RV business. If so, you might be asking:

## How Else Could Employee Efficiency Be Increased?

Your dealership management system (DMS) might include a function that could increase the speed and accuracy of many of the repetitive sales transactions in your RV business. This function might be termed materials list or service




**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.



tasks — or some similar name. If you are uncertain if your DMS offers this function, I suggest that you contact your DMS support team after reading my explanation of the possible features within this type of function.

These two functions have a slightly different purpose, yet each can reduce the processing time and any errors related to commonly performed procedures.

A materials list contains the goods required to complete a routine procedure, many of which could be performed by one of your DIY customers who is interested in the installation of an accessory. By including every item required for the performance of this process, you minimize the time required to sell this accessory and you minimize the opportunity that a needed item will be overlooked.

The service task function takes this to another level by including the labor needed to install an accessory or to process a maintenance/repair on an RV. If you have developed a materials list for the goods and materials required for a routinely performed procedure, then you merely need to add the labor charge(s) related to the process.

If any special tool(s) is/are required for your technician to perform this service, then you could include it/them in the service task.

A related benefit to developing these functions in your DMS is that your personnel can quickly and accurately quote total costs of either a materials list or a service task.

The development of these materials lists and service tasks will require some effort. However, you should realize a substantial return on your development time investment with each recurrence of these routinely performed procedures.

Maybe some of you have already incorporated these DMS functions in your fixed operations and you might be asking:

## How Else Could I Increase Operational Efficiency?

The following are some additional examples that could possibly enhance the efficiency of your parts operations.

Occasionally, your parts associates might be contacted by a customer who is RVing and has need of an item (or items) for repair of her RV. If your parts associate offers to order the item(s) so they will be available when the customer arrives for service, it might be necessary to collect some specific information so that the correct item(s) can be procured. Requesting the customer send some photos might be a great way to minimize errors and save time for the customer and for your parts associate. Since "a picture is worth a thousand words," using this form of digital technology could increase the efficiency of your parts associates.

When working with some of my clients to improve their operations, I frequently suggest that they document a process with a DWP. If they agree to do so, I work with them to develop at least one DWP. Usually, I have the parts manager schedule a brainstorming session with all the parts associates and at least one representative from any other department that might be impacted by this process. By including other departments in the development of the DWP, you enhance the opportunity that the process will be successful because everyone had a voice in the development.

There are other opportunities for increasing the efficiency and profitability of your parts operations, such as:

- Using cardboard cartons with trash can liners as trash receptacles rather than plastic or metal trash cans
- Using the blank side of report paper to make notepads for your personnel rather than purchasing notepads
- Scheduling your personnel based on workflow requirements rather than everyone working the same shift

Remember, your bottom line is impacted by how efficiently you control your operating expenses. When working through the Five Steps of Finances, less expenses could mean more net profit. RVP



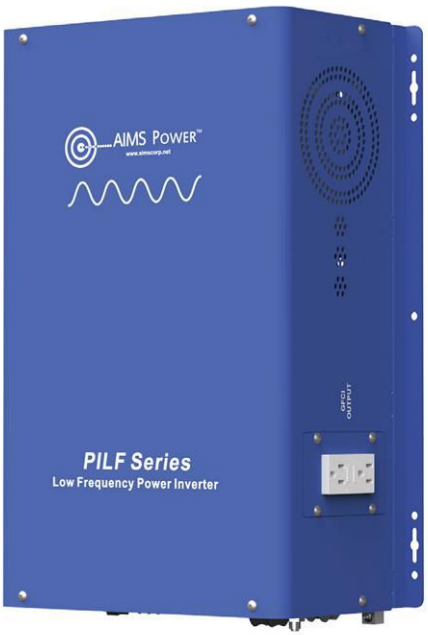



# NEW PRODUCTS FOR 2025

## SINE POWER INVERTERS

**AIMS Power,** Reno, Nevada, offers its Low Frequency Pure Sine Power Inverters. The new Low Frequency Power Inverters are AIMS Power's new line of inverters. Designed to meet the growing demands of the market, these inverters are rugged, durable and built to last. With a high surge capacity and ETL listing to UL standards, they ensure reliable performance and safety. Built to withstand tough conditions, the inverters meet stringent safety and performance criteria and are easy to install and operate.

**aimscorp.net**







## TITLE & REGISTRATION SERVICE

**AppOne,** Kettering, Ohio, presents its VTR50 - Title and Registration. AppOne, in partnership with Auto Data Direct, offers VTR50 to RV, marine, powersports and other specialty vehicle dealerships. From initial titling to annual registration renewals, duplicate requests and more, AppOne works with state DMVs and third-party agencies to ensure all laws, requirements, forms and fees are processed properly.

**hubs.la/Q033KgvF0**

## WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION HITCH

**Curt Manufacturing,** Eau Claire, Wisconsin, offers its TruTrack Trailer-Mounted WD Hitch. The CURT TruTrack trailer-mounted weight distribution hitch allows you to effortlessly connect and disconnect your trailer with ease. No more struggling with heavy spring bars or a complicated setup every time you hitch up.

**curtmfg.com**






## DRINKING WATER HOSE

**Camco Manufacturing,** Greensboro, North Carolina, presents its EvoFlex2 50-Foot Drinking Water Hose. The Camco EvoFlex2 50-Foot Drinking Water Hose is perfect for RV and marine use, offering durable, extra-flexible construction that resists cracks and leaks. Its aluminum fittings, molded strain relief and 5/8-inch inner diameter ensure reliable water flow. Lead-free, BPA-free and phthalate-free, it delivers clean, great-tasting water with no plastic aftertaste. The advanced inner liner enhances flexibility, while the tough polyester fabric ensures long-lasting performance. Also available in a 25-foot option.

**camco.net**



## ROOFTOP CLIMATE CONTROL SYSTEM

**Eberspächer Climate,** Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, offers its Breezonic Performance HP, a climate control system designed for motorhomes and camper vans. Beyond cooling, its integrated heat pump provides reliable warmth during cooler months, operating efficiently between -7 C to 52 C (19.4 F to 125.6 F). Ideal for year-round travelers, the Breezonic ensures comfort in diverse climates. Compact and eco-friendly, it's a perfect solution for consistent, energy-efficient temperature control on the road.

**eberspaecher-motorhomes.com**

## RV FURNACE

**FOGATTI,** Elkhart, Indiana, presents its RV Furnace: InstaHeat Ultra, a heating solution for RVs. It features a soft start function that adjusts fan speed to prevent power surges, ensuring smooth operation. The smart wired controller offers three modes: turbo, standard and Sleep. It also enables precise gas flow adjustments for optimal combustion. With intelligent heating optimization, the furnace quickly reaches the desired temperature, providing efficient warmth in a short time.

**fogatti.com**






## PROPANE ADAPTOR

**Marshall Excelsior,** Marshall, Michigan, offers its ME499P. The ME499P adapts your LP grill, portable stove or other gas appliances to a full-size LP cylinder instead of the small disposable style. RVIA compliant, it connects portable appliances to RV propane cylinders. Includes a limited five-year manufacturer warranty and display packaging.

**marshallexcelsior.com**




## PORTABLE AC UNIT

**Lippert,** Elkhart, Indiana, offers its Furrion Chill Cube 18k AC, a portable air conditioning solution. Unlike conventional RV AC units that run at a fixed speed, the Furrion Chill Cube's compressors adjust their speed to match cooling requirements in an RV or camper. This intelligent operation ensures a seamless, noise-free experience that's quieter than single fan models. The variable speed compressors smoothly ramp up to speed, eliminating excessive amperage usage and the need for aftermarket soft start devices, providing flexibility with generators.

**lippert.com**




## BUG & TAR REMOVER

**Bling Sauce,** Phoenix, offers its Bug Sauce pH Neutral Bug and Tar Remover. Bug Sauce is designed for every RV, trailer and vehicle owner. This cleaning product is easy to use and highly effective at removing both bugs and tar. Just spray onto the surface and wipe away with a microfiber towel. Bug Sauce is safe for all surfaces, including paint, chrome, PPF and windshields. Includes a 3-foot trigger sprayer to reach up to 14 feet without the use of a ladder.

**blingsauce.com**



## BANISTER RAIL

**Stromberg Carlson,** Traverse City, Michigan, presents its Lend-A-Hand Banister Rail, which provides support as you go up or down steps. The 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, designed 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**



## WINDOW SHADE REPAIR KIT

**MCD Innovations,** an Airxcel brand, McKinney, Texas, offers its Adventure Ready Kits, which offer convenience for RV enthusiasts seeking efficient window shade repairs. Each kit includes all necessary components, ensuring a seamless and professional repair process. With a comprehensive, all-in-one solution, these kits save you time and resources. Accompanied by a detailed owner's manual, they guarantee a hassle-free experience.

**mcdinnovations.com**



## TANKLESS WATER HEATER

**GE Appliances,** Recreational Living, Louisville, Kentucky, presents its GE Profile Tankless Water Heater. The all-new GE Profile tankless water heater delivers reliable performance in any weather. Built with heavy-duty hardware and a durable exhaust flue, it manages wind and water effectively. Enjoy steady temperatures with its mixing tank, freeze protection down to 0 F and operation up to 10,000 feet. Featuring a compact design, modern control panel and easy winterization. Includes a two-year warranty. Doors available separately in white or black.

**geappliances.com**







## DUAL FUEL GENERATOR

**RV Mobile Power,** Columbus, Ohio, offers its Flex Power 4000e Dual Fuel Generator. One of the industry leaders in CARB compliance, the RVMP Flex Power 4000e generator features a proprietary electronically fuel injected technology that is 50-state CARB compliant, ensuring flexibility wherever your journey takes you. The 4000e pairs reliability, with output that has minimal distortion. Compact, quiet, powerful and efficient, it powers your RV's appliances or recharges your battery bank for extended off-grid boondocking.

**rvmp.com**




## ALTERNATOR REGULATOR

**Revatek,** Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, presents its Altion, an alternator regulator for high-power charging. Replace the generator using the engine you already have and achieve 20% to 35% faster charging with universal compatibility (12-48-volt, lead-acid/lithium) and single or dual alternator control. Enjoy app-free Wi-Fi setup, simple configuration using any device, dynamic engine load management and an integrated OLED display. RV-C, J1939 and Victron connectivity. Compact footprint is 70% to 85% smaller than alternative products.

**revatek.com**









## FURNACE & WATER HEATERS

**Truma North America,** Elkhart, Indiana, presents its Truma Combi D comfort/comfort plus. The redesigned Truma Combi D comfort and comfort plus 2-in-1 furnace and water heaters offer a single-fuel option for diesel motorhomes while fitting the same footprint as the original propane Combi. The Combi D features six operating levels for more efficient and flexible energy consumption, with the comfort plus models also offering electric or mixed operating modes. Another upgrade is automatic altitude adjustment, which allows the system to perform at high elevations without additional parts or preparation.

truma.com




## HOLDING TANK TREATMENT

**Thetford,** Ann Arbor, Michigan, offers its Aqua-Kem. Thetford's award-winning Aqua-Kem is a fast, effective waste treatment that breaks down waste quickly, deodorizes and keeps your holding tank clean and fresh for longer-lasting use.

thetford.com




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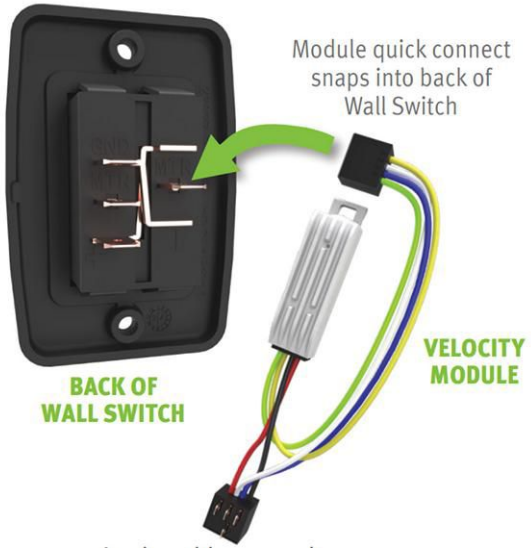
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## AWNING CONTROL UPGRADE

**Velarium,** an Airxcel brand, Elkhart, Indiana, presents its Velocity Switch. Nearly double the speed of awning deployment and retraction with the Velocity Switch by Velarium. The Velocity Switch is an efficiency enhancement for existing RV awning switches that uses proprietary technology to offer quicker operation and improved motor longevity. Velarium's Velocity Switch features integrated soft start technology to initiate the motor gently, helping to extend its life span. The Velocity Switch is easy to install and compatible with most vertical arm awnings.

**velariumawnings.com**

## JACK PADS

**Valterra Products,** Mission Hills, California, offers its StayPut Jack Pads. These durable, lightweight pads prevent jacks from sinking into soft ground, ensuring stability and safety for all stabilizing tasks. Available in two sizes — four small pads (7 1/4 inches by 7 1/4 inches) or two large pads (11 7/8 inches by 11 7/8 inches) — to accommodate various jack types and weights. It also comes with a handy storage strap.

**valterra.com**





## Use Camplux Propane RV Cooktop

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If you're interested in submitting a product for the Special Product Focus section, submit to your sales rep: Rebecca Tittel: rtittel@cahabamedia.com or John Gaskins: jgaskins@cahabamedia.com. Or contact Managing Editor Michele Moore for information: mmoore@cahabamedia.com.




## HOLDING TANK TREATMENT

**Walex Products Co.,** Wilmington, North Carolina, offers its Bio-Fresh Liquid, a premium liquid version of Bio-Pak. Powered by an advanced Next Generation Enzyme System, it rapidly digests paper and waste while delivering odor control for up to seven days. Its eco-friendly formula ensures effectiveness while being safe for your system and the environment. Choose from two fragrances: Ocean Mist and Alpine Fresh. Available in convenient 32-ounce, 64-ounce and 1-gallon sizes.

**walex.com**




## FREEZE DAMAGE PREVENTION

**Xtreme Heaters,** Buford, Georgia, presents its Xtreme Heaters XLarge 1000W XXXXHEAT Industrial Heater, the company's largest capacity freeze protection heater yet. Designed and built tough for industrial environments, it's ideal for underskirted RVs, tiny homes or travel trailers. Featuring an automatic thermostat that kicks on at 50 F and off at 65 F, guarding against freezing, it's rated for outdoor use, can't overheat and works in any orientation.

**xtremeheaters.com**


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# Pit Stop



## THE CRYSTAL BALL
## TAKE A LOOK AT HIPCAMP'S FIVE PREDICTIONS FOR 2025 TRAVEL



- **Family glamping bookings, driven by budget-conscious families, will double this year.**
  - 87% YOY increase in searches for luxury amenities
- **Mobile apps will drive an increase in same-day, on-the-go bookings.**
  - Same-day bookings are growing by 33% YOY
- **Weather insurance uptake will double on Hipcamp and become more widespread.**
  - 76% of customers feel more confident booking a trip with a weather guarantee
- **More farmers will introduce camping on their land for the first time in 2025.**
  - Policies supporting "agritourism" and farm stays are passing globally
- **Astronomical events will prompt 60% more campers to book trips this year.**
  - March's total lunar eclipse will create an early spike in media attention, fueling momentum for spring and summer bookings
  - This year, a peak in the sun's 11-year solar cycle will make 2025 the 'Year of the Aurora'

*Source: Hipcamp*

## 2024 RV SHIPMENTS

**333,733 (units)**
**Total RV shipments**

**6.6% increase for the year**

**December 2024 reached 23,253 units — a 7.6% rise over December 2023**

"Despite challenges, the RV industry showed resilience and an upward trajectory in 2024, and continued to demonstrate its broad appeal to consumers," said RVIA President and CEO Craig Kirby. "These modest gains provide a solid foundation to build upon, and we are confident that with continued innovation and dedication to customer satisfaction, the RV industry will see even greater success in 2025."

## 6 RV Spring Cleaning Tips

In addition to essential dewinterizing tasks, here are a few RV cleaning tips to get your camper clean and sparkling before the first adventure of the season:

1. **Wash the exterior:** Always start at the top and work down using a cleaner that will not harm RV paneling.
2. **Check for critters:** Look for any bugs, spiders or mice that may have found their way into the camper during winter.



3. **Clean fans and air conditioners:** Clean fan blades and screens with warm soapy water.
4. **Wash windows and screens:** Remove window screens and clean them gently using soapy water.
5. **Change linens and towels:** Replace linens removed for storage and change all bedding, pillows, blankets, towels and washcloths.



6. **Vacuum:** Vacuum RV floors and inside the cabinets to remove any dust.

Source: Kampgrounds of America



## TRENDING NOW

***Omnichannel marketing*** is a multichannel sales approach that provides users with a convenient, seamless experience, whether they shop online or in a brick-and-mortar store. (Think the Nike app that lets customers browse and reserve items in-store, scan QR codes for product info, get recommendations based on prior purchases and unlock access to new stuff).

- **78% of consumers said they use two or more channels** to browse, research and make purchases — 30% said they use three channels or more.
- **RV companies can stand out to consumers** looking to buy or rent an RV by weaving online and brick-and-mortar shopping experiences.

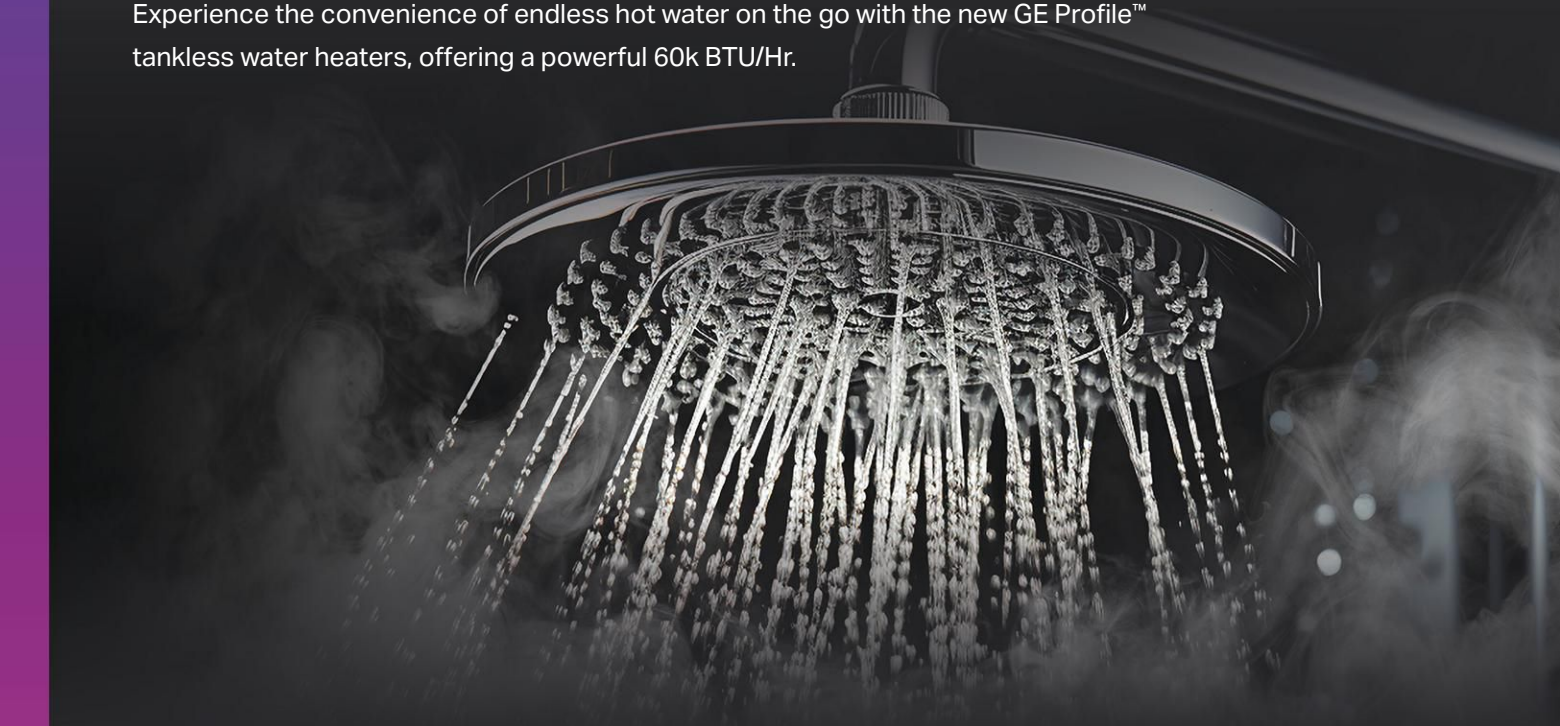
*Source: RetailDive, Go RVing*

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Experience the convenience of endless hot water on the go with the new GE Profile™ tankless water heaters, offering a powerful 60k BTU/Hr.



**Heavy duty door design** features sleek stainless steel hardware and helps prevent rainwater from entering the unit. A durable exhaust flue design provides superior wind and water management in all weather conditions.

**Altitude adjustment capability** up to 10,100 feet is perfect for high-altitude adventures, outperforming the competition.

**Advanced freeze prevention** prevents pipe freezing, offering superior protection and reliablity in harsh conditions.

**Built-in mixing tank** provides steady temperatures and helps eliminate hot- and cold-water fluctuations.

**NEW** GE Profile™
Tankless Water Heaters



**PR60PTLWBU**

*Door & Control Switch Sold Separately*

**White Door** (PMTWRT)
**Black Door** (PMTBRT)
**Black Control Switch** (PMBSRT)

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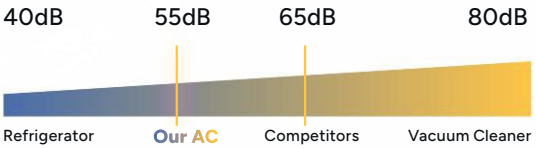
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