

March 2022

# RV PRO

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RVPRO

Best New Products

PARTS AND ACCESSORIES

2022

## Back by Popular Demand

*Forest River's top-of-the-line Charleston diesel pusher makes a triumphant return.*

### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- **RV PRO Shares Annual Dealer Quality Scores**
  - January RV Distributor Show Coverage
  - THOR, Winnebago Debut Electric RV Concepts
  - FCCC Emphasizes 'Custom' in Latest Chassis Models





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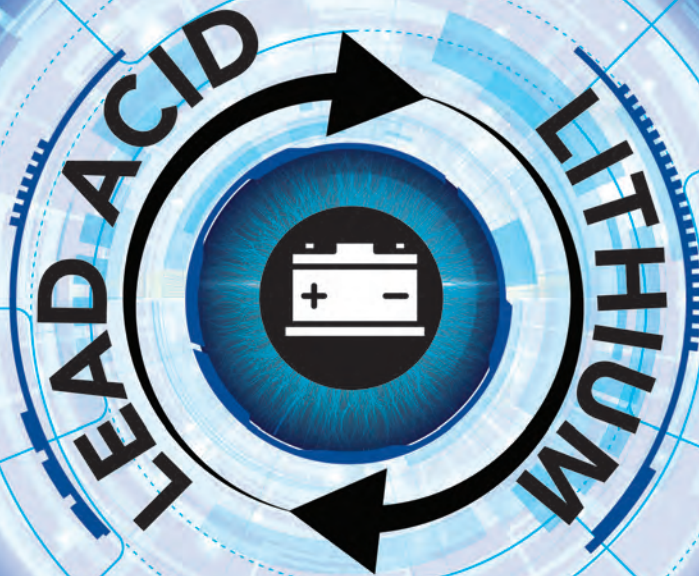
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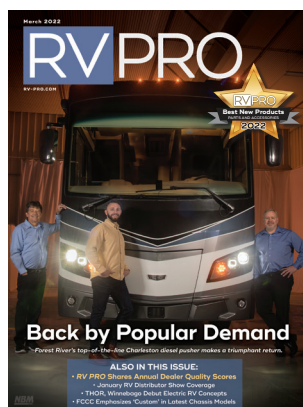
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**ABOUT THE COVER:**  
From left to right, Forest River's Dave Carpenter, Tim Cunningham and Brady Main are pictured next to the new-for-2022 Charleston top-of-the-line diesel motorhome, which marks a return to the market after a hiatus. (Photo by Steve Toepp/ Midwest Photographics)

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## CERTIFIED AUDIENCE

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# Outlook for 2022? 'It Depends,' Dealers Say



**Bradley  
Worrell**  
EDITOR  
brad@nbm.com

**B**y all accounts, this should be another great year for the RV industry – and for RV dealers in particular.

After all, the RV Industry Association's forecasting firm, ITR Economics, is predicting that RV shipments will exceed 600,000 units, which would make for a stellar year – especially coming off 600,000 RVs shipped last year, which marked a record year for the industry.

For their part, dealers responding to *RV PRO*'s third annual reader survey in January were optimistic on the whole, with 30 percent saying they will sell even more RVs this year compared to 2021 and 54 percent of dealers saying they will sell roughly the same number of RVs this year as last year. Only 15 percent of dealers expect their RV sales will be down this year compared to 2021.

However, dealers also voiced some concerns. Notably, 57 percent of dealers surveyed said their current RV inventory levels are 50 percent or less of what they were compared to pre-COVID pandemic levels. An additional 25.5 percent of dealers said their inventory levels stand between roughly half and three-quarters of what they were compared to pre-COVID levels.

What's more, asked to rank their top three concerns, dealers cited supply chain issues, at 61.4 percent, inventory at 52.3 percent and labor at 51.3 percent. Inflation came in a close fourth at 40.1 percent.

Those numbers mirror feedback *RV PRO* has received from dealers at distributor shows and in one-on-one conversations. Incidentally, for the Canadian dealer outlook for 2022, be sure to read this month's dealer trends story, starting on page 89.

There does appear to be some good news on the RV parts inventory front, with multiple distributors telling *RV PRO* they have taken steps to stock up on inventory in order to meet dealer demand. (On that note, be sure to check out *RV PRO* coverage of distributor shows in this issue, starting on page 44.)

Whether RV manufacturers can keep dealers sufficiently supplied as the busy summer selling season kicks off remains to be seen, but if they fall short, it won't be for a lack of trying. Unemployment in Elkhart, Ind., is the lowest in the nation, at 1.9 percent.

Speaking of the aforementioned survey, dealers once again made their voices heard regarding which RV manufacturers they believe rate best in quality. They also weighed in on important matters such as warranty policies, the ability to secure replacement parts, best PDI and best resale value. Be sure to check out what dealers told us in that survey, starting on page 18.

Meanwhile, on a happy note, it would appear that COVID-19 is receding, based upon falling hospitalization and infection rates across the country as of mid-February. While some restrictions for public safety may remain, I know everyone in our industry – and beyond – will welcome a return to anything approaching normal.

As always, thanks for reading.

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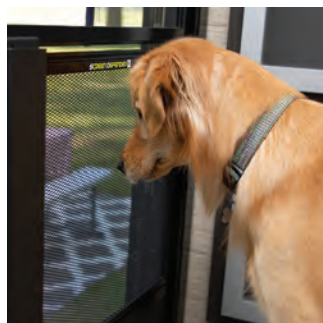
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The Charleston offers many contemporary interior finishes with its matte-finish porcelain tile throughout the coach, roller-style day/night shades and crown trim in the kitchen and bedroom ceilings.

# Back by Popular Demand

By Rob Merwin

**Forest River's apex Class A diesel pusher, the Charleston, returns to the company's lineup for the first time since 2017 to meet customer demand and new buyer demographics.**

Forest River's topline Class A luxury diesel motorhome – the Charleston – is back. After a four-year hiatus, the coach has returned in 2022 for the manufacturer's expanding customer base, which also is gravitating toward more high-end motorhomes.

"Customers are super-excited to have it back," says Tim Cunningham, Forest River's national sales manager and product manager for diesel motorhomes. "It's always been known as our high-end unit with a good following. The Charleston's return allows us to get enter that high-quality motorhome market with what people want today. Our Forest River fans now have that avenue to get into a top-quality diesel."

He adds that the timing was right for the Charleston's reintroduction.

"We had always wanted to bring it back, but in order to build a high-end unit you need to have the right infrastructure and production capabilities, as well as good timing," he says. "We didn't want to rush it, and we wanted to be confident in our ability to deliver a high-quality product."

Cunningham says that Forest River's customers have been increasingly stepping up into newer RVs with more amenities in recent years. The Charleston reintroduction was a direct response to fill that need, he says, rather than have potential customers seek a comparable unit elsewhere.





PHOTOS COURTESY OF FOREST RIVER UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.



Years in the making, Forest River's Charleston luxury diesel pusher returns to the market in 2022, built on a custom-designed Freightliner XCR raised-rail chassis and offering topline features inside the coach and out. Pictured here (from left to right) are Dave Carpenter, general manager of Forest River's diesel division; Tim Cunningham, national sales manager; and Brady Main, engineering manager. (Photo by Steve Toepp/ Midwest Photographics)

"Now we have that next step up for them," he says. "With our expanding customer base, it was the perfect time for the Charleston and keep them in the Forest River family."

### Redesigned from the Ground Up

The Charleston differentiates from the competition in part with its custom-designed chassis from Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp. (see related story on page 34).

"Our relationship with Freightliner and our desire to get into the higher-end market was a great opportunity to take us to the next level," Cunningham says. "Their engineers and our engineers worked together to push the envelop of what is typically a traditional deal. We took some things further that haven't been done before."

Specifically, the new Charleston chassis has Freightliner's Road-Watch system, which offers many safety features including collision mitigation and collision braking. The 36-foot Charleston also has a 15,000-pound towing capacity, compared to competitors' 5,000-pound towing capacity.

The coach also features integrated awnings, which affords the motorhome a new look, as well as four exterior graphic and color packages: Constellation, Deep Space, Nebula and Polaris. The unit features contemporary interior finishes.



The Charleston 36A floorplan features an oversized booth as well as a Villa Ultrafab hide-a-bed sofa in the galley for extra sleeping capacity.





**In the galley, the Charleston features semi-gloss hardwood cabinetry, hardwood raised-panel cabinet doors, solid-surface kitchen countertops and stainless-steel appliances, including a 30-inch convection microwave oven, an induction glass cooktop, a 23-cubic-foot French door residential refrigerator with an ice maker and a stainless-steel dishwasher.**

**The Charleston's pantry contains slide-out drawers offering easy access to stored kitchen items.**



The motorhome's Freightliner XCR Raised Rail Chassis with a Cummins engine is mated to an Allison 3000MH six-speed transmission. Its independent front suspension (IFS) and V-ride (rear axle) rides on Michelin tires. The Charleston is equipped with a 100-gallon fuel tank.

The interior has a side radiator and boasts a flush floor, which was an intentional modification of the chassis in order to avoid the engine compartment step-up in the rear.

"There can be smaller units with a side radiator, but you wouldn't be able to maximize a coach's space," Cunningham explains. "We try and make as many features standard as possible to help the customers, and we don't compromise on any components. We've been very fortunate to have not run into any (supply chain) hiccups. We haven't had 'de-content' a unit, as some other manufacturers have had to. If we have to wait, then we have to wait. We build our units with a dedication and commitment that fulfill people's expectations."

The Charleston's construction and exterior offers fiberglass front and rear caps, a four-point fully automatic hydraulic leveling system with auto air dump, a steel basement structure and a one-piece fiberglass roof (crowned and layered vacuum-bonded). The coach features an 84-inch ceiling height and a 30-inch entryway.

Heating and cooling features include an Aqua Hot hydronic heat with continuous-flow hot water, electric heated tile floors, two 15,000-BTU air conditioners with heat pump, a Maxxair fan in the galley and an electric fireplace.

### **Charleston is Loaded with Amenities**

In the galley, the Charleston features a 30-inch OTR convection microwave oven, an electric induction glass cooktop, a stainless-steel dishwasher, and a 23-cubic-foot French door residential refrigerator with an ice maker.

The motorhome is prepped for a washer and dryer.

The Charleston comes well-equipped with entertainment offerings, including four TVs (one each in the living room, exterior, bedroom and cockpit); a high-definition digital TV antennae; a JBL sound bar with a subwoofer; an auto Wi-Fi extended-range Falcon antennae and router; a Blu-ray DVD player; high-definition Cat6 matrix signal distribution; and dash radio-tuned amplifier with a sub stereo system. The motorhome is prepped for a roof-mounted Winegard Trav'ler satellite.



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The cockpit enjoys a 10-inch dash radio with color back-up and side view camera package with navigation; a Mobileye collision avoidance system; an electronic cruise control with high idle; 3D carbon-fiber dash panels; multiple auxiliary/USB and 12V charging ports at the dash; a driver console wireless cellphone charger; and keyless entry. The coach also features a passenger seat workstation.

“Customers are going to be pleasantly surprised with what they get with the Charleston – especially in its price range,” Cunningham says. “It comes with all the equipment and components that people expect when getting into this diesel market. You’re not going to see a unit like this at this price point elsewhere.”

The Charleston’s MSRP starts at \$575,000.

Forest River’s launch of the 2022 Charleston has one floorplan, the 36A, although the manufacturer also has a chassis ready to go for a 45-footer, which is presently in the prototype stage.

“It’s a difficult unit to build because of its numerous complexities, but we expect it to hit the market by the end of the year,” Cunningham says.

### **Coach Designed for a Changing Customer Demographic**

The customer base for the Charleston has expanded beyond the typical high-end Class A diesel pusher clientele of middle-aged consumers with disposable cash, according to Cunningham. “Historically, we’ve been known as a good bunkhouse manufacturer, and now we’ve expanded on that reputation,” he says.

The Berkshire line, which Cunningham’s division also manufactures, and Charleston have now grown to include two full bathroom bunkhouses, which is attractive as a family-orientated coach. “We have a lot of younger people who are buying across the range of our products. They aren’t just the typical retirees anymore,” he says. “Families are now doing remote schooling and work, which allows them to opportunity to get into a Charleston and also enjoy the RV lifestyle. Our units aren’t just dedicated bunkhouses – there can be wardrobes or a desk space. It’s a very user-friendly coach that comes with great customer service.”

He adds that customers also seek the benefits of the many amenities Forest River offers and the Charleston’s high-class reputation, which he says offers a lot of “bang for the buck.”

“All we do out of our Forest River division is build the Berkshire and the Charleston, and we excel at providing a great product, much of which is because we’re a really tightknit group that’s focused on quality and customer service,” Cunningham says. “We try not to step outside of our ‘lane’ too much. We want to keep our customers happy with an excellent product. We’re focused on our ability to control the marketplace in terms of what we’re offering and how quickly we can meet our customers’ needs.”



**The Charleston’s bathroom features many of the same touches found in a nice home, including a good-sized shower with shelves for holding shampoo and other items, good-sized mirrors, and polished solid-surface countertops.**





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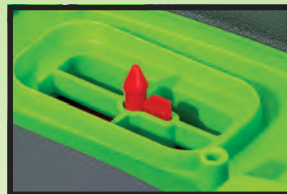
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In the bedroom, the Charleston has a 72-inch by 80-inch Serta king bed equipped with a power recline feature. Bed nightstands come with dual USB jacks and overhead cabinetry.



The wardrobe area includes the same quality cabinetry found in the galley area and includes auto wardrobe lights. An electronic safe for keeping valuables is located in the wardrobe area.

### Customer Feedback Drives Product

That “control” is the ability of Cunningham and his team to be nimble in the Charleston’s design and manufacturing as they receive a continuous flow of consumer feedback. The benefit of Forest River is that each division “runs it’s own show,” he says, and they can respond to feedback without having to run it up a chain of command in order to implement changes. “It’s easy for us to operate and be successful.”

The lion’s share of feedback comes from word of mouth, Cunningham points out, which often comes from events such as FROG (Forest River Owners Group) rallies at the Elkhart fairgrounds where there’s an abundance of customer interactions.

“We talk to so many different customers on a daily basis and at shows,” he says. “We’re always listening and attentive to their needs and questions, from maintenance and care concerns to new ideas.”

Forest River Forums (ForestRiverForums.com) also are fertile ground for customer feedback, where Cunningham’s team can respond to customers’ questions.

“We’re really excited to continue to offer the Charleston and customers are going to like what we’ve been spending a lot of time on,” he says. “I believe in our product and our growth. It’s something to be proud of and to be part of. The customer base that we have is a large part of the Charleston’s success. We have our niche, and we understand who they are – and who we are.” **RV2**



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# THIRD ANNUAL Dealer Quality Scores

Compiled by RV PRO

Welcome to *RV PRO*'s third annual Dealer Quality Scores survey, conducted in early January.

We asked our dealer readers to offer their opinions about which companies they believe are the industry's top-performing RV manufacturers. As in past years, it quickly became apparent that dealers have strong opinions on this subject.

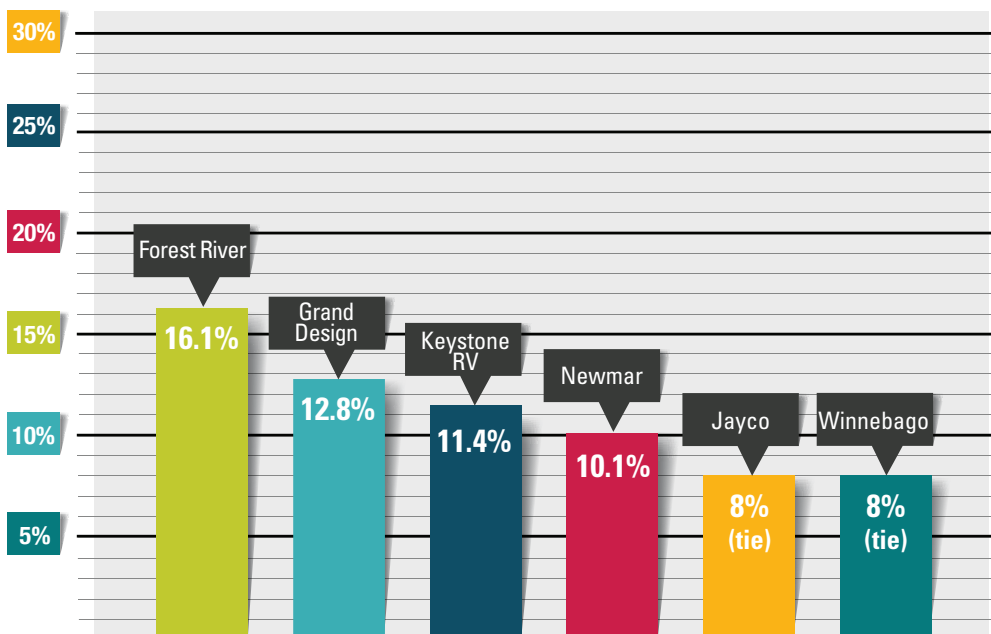
More than 200 dealers took the survey, although not every dealer answered every question. Still, *RV PRO* is grateful for the strong response it received from survey takers.

Readers will find that certain manufacturers – including Airstream, Forest River, Grand Design, Jayco and Keystone RV, Tiffin Motorhomes and Winnebago – generally performed well across survey categories, including quality, warranty, PDI, warranty policy and resale value.

## Methodology

In all cases, totals listed for charts in this section do not equal 100 percent. With so many listed RV manufacturer choices for dealer readers to choose from, *RV PRO* set 5.5 percent as the minimum threshold to be considered for inclusion in survey charts featured in this section.

## Which OEM has the best warranty policy?\*



\* Top 6 Survey responses

As in the 2021 survey, Forest River took the top spot. Also as in 2021, Grand Design, Jayco, Keystone RV and Newmar all made the Top 5 list. Winnebago was new to the Top 5 list this year.



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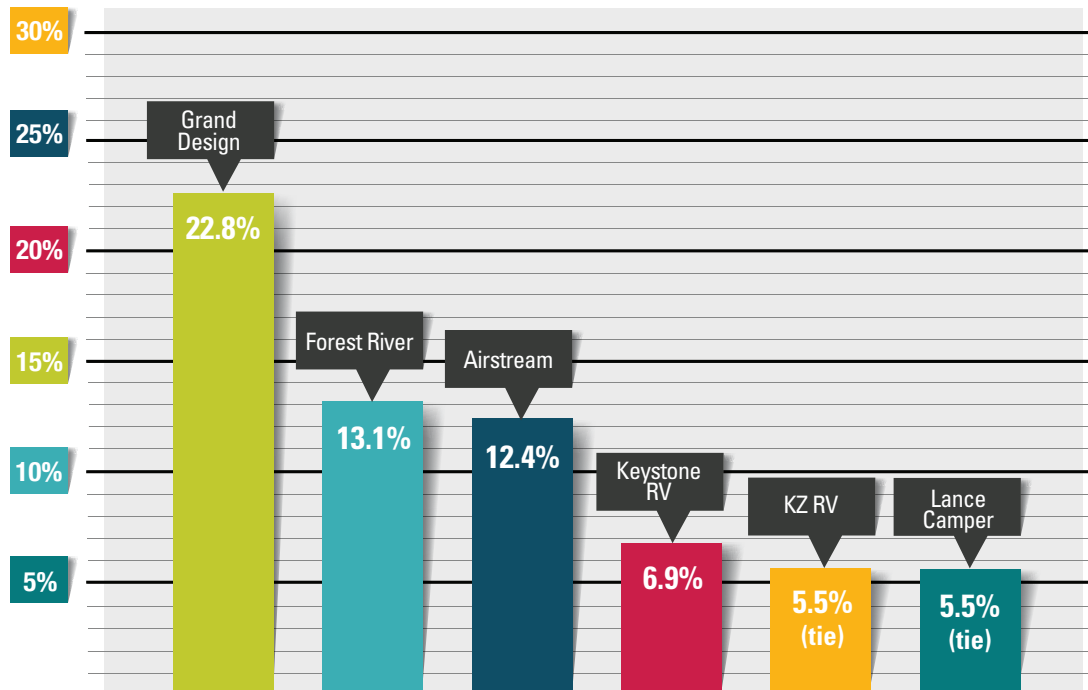


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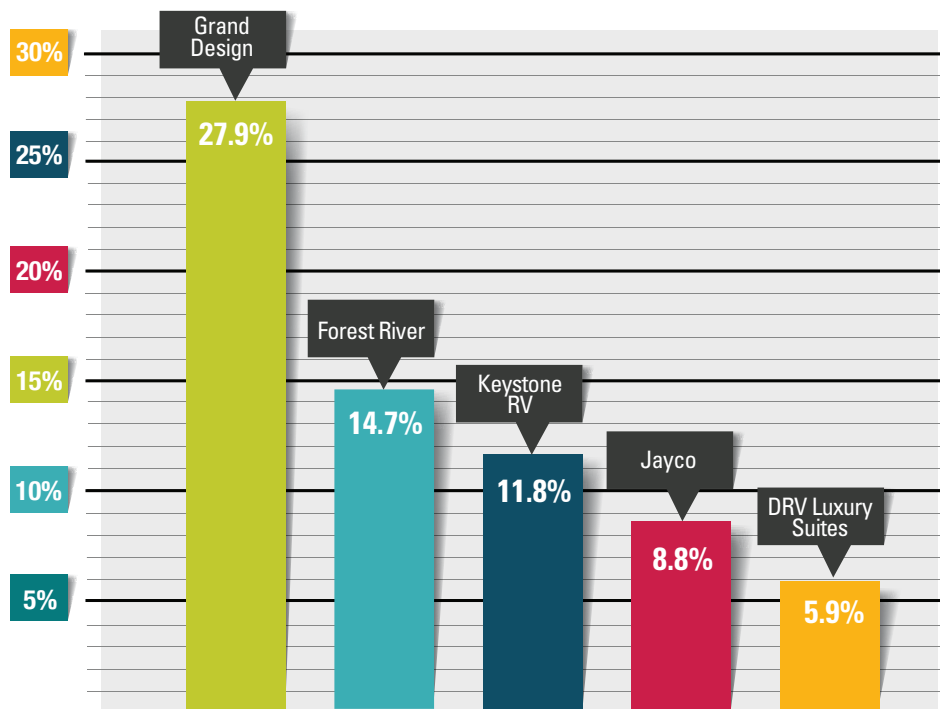


### Which travel trailer OEM has the best quality?\*



\* Top 6 Survey responses

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

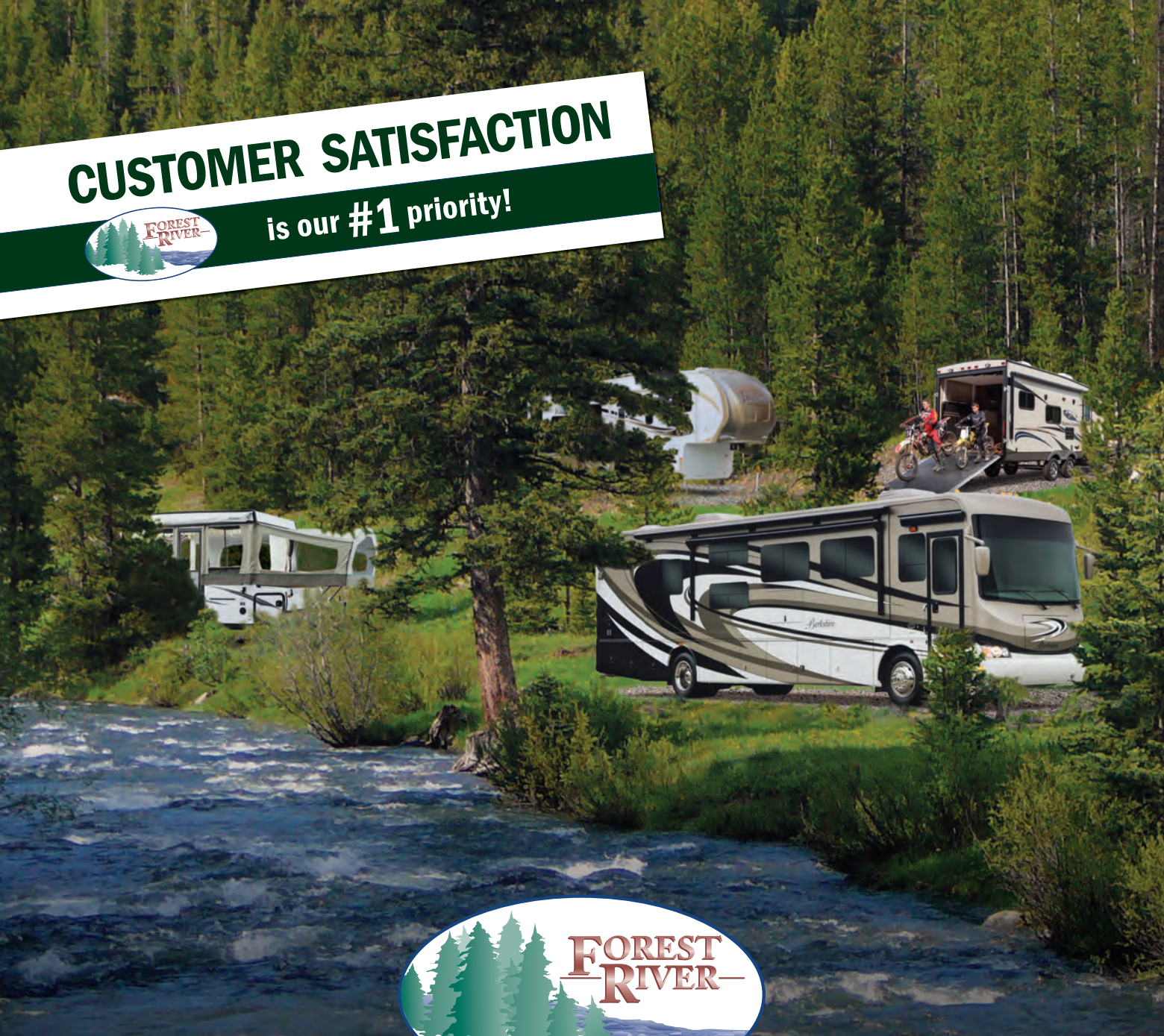


\*\* Top 5 Survey responses

For the second year in a row, Grand Design took the top honors in both the travel trailer and the fifth wheel category. Forest River and Keystone RV also placed in the Top 5 for both travel trailers and fifth wheels for the second year in a row.

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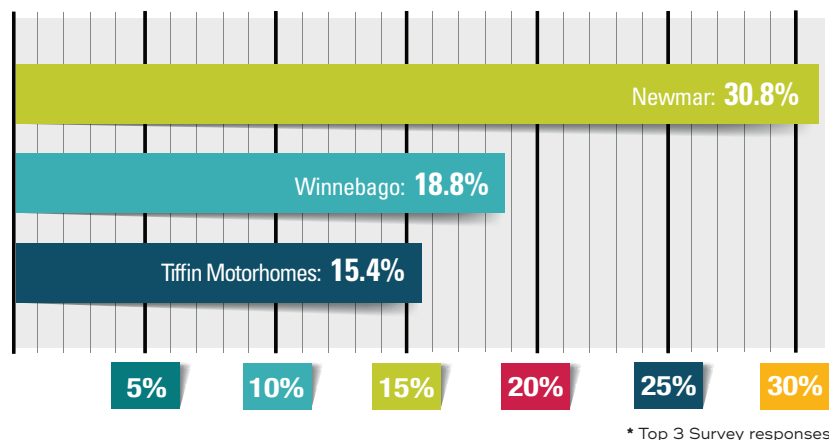
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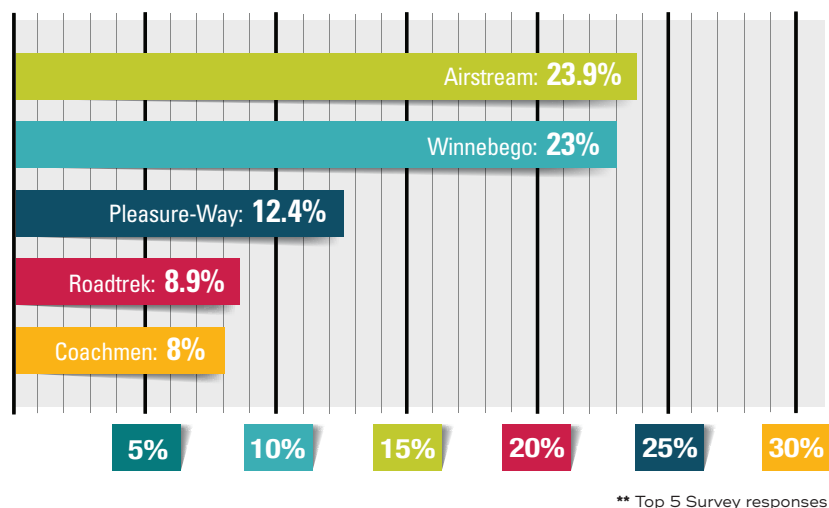


### Which Class A OEM has the best quality?\*

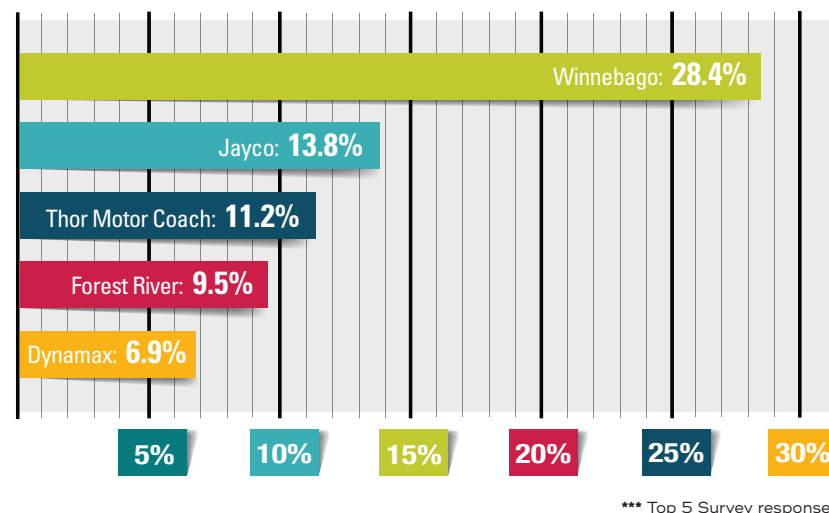


For the second year in a row, Winnebago placed in the Top 5 across all three motorhome categories: Class A, B & C. Newmar repeated its top finish in the Class A segment in 2022, while Airstream jumped from third place to first in the Class B segment for the year, and Winnebago retained its first-place spot in the Class C category this year.

### Which Class B OEM has the best quality? \*\*



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





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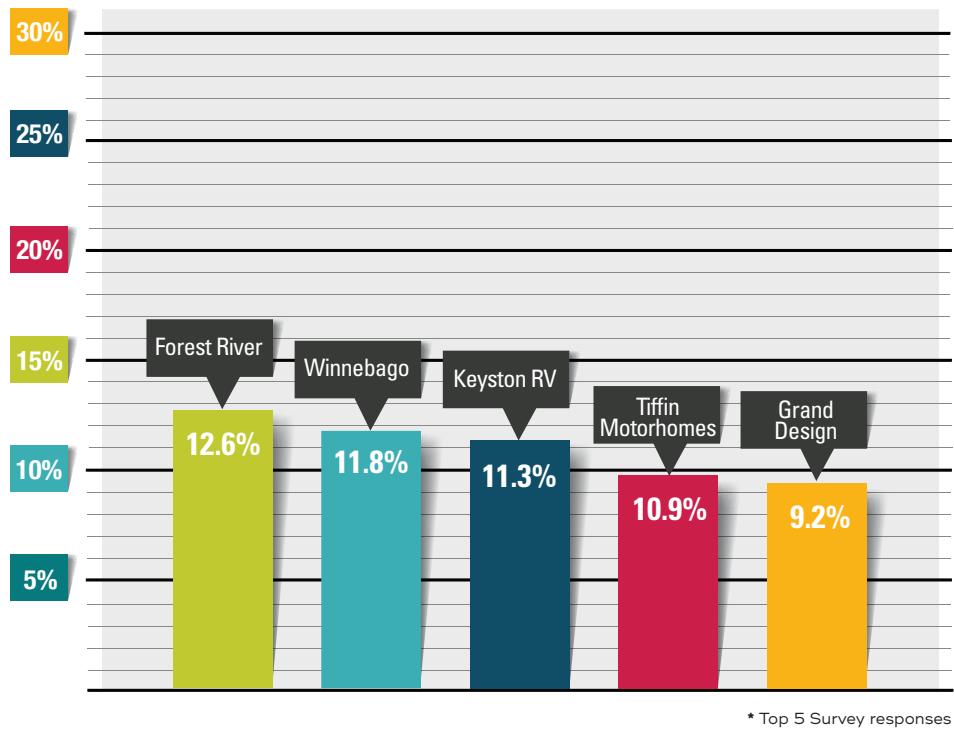


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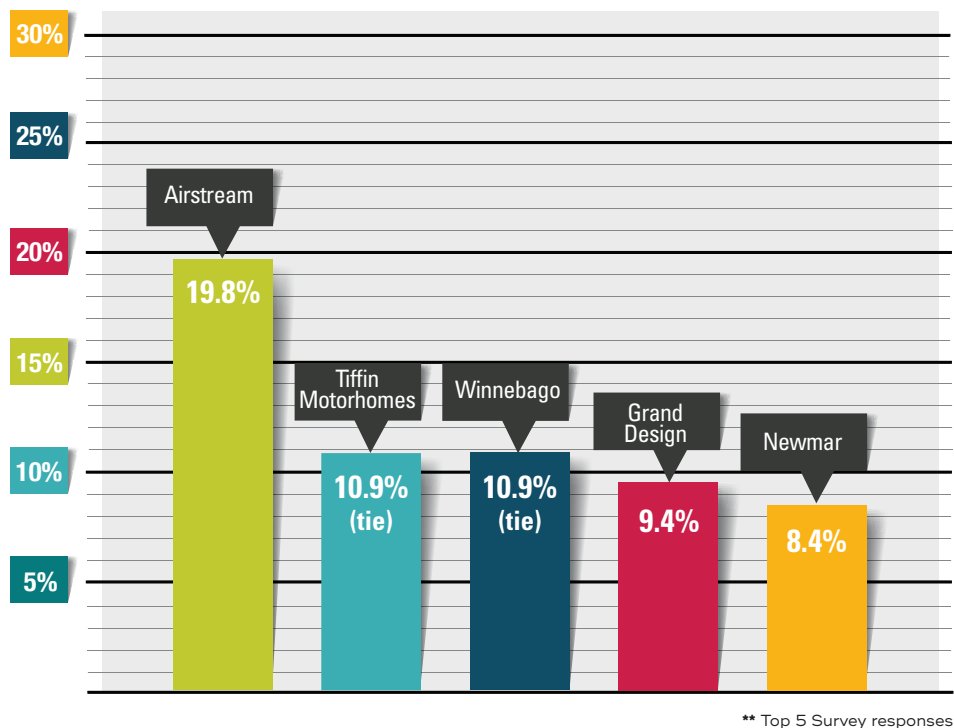


### Which OEM is it easiest to get replacement parts from?\*



Forest River took the top spot in this year's survey, marking its second-in-a-row first-place finish. Keystone RV, Grand Design, Tiffin and Winnebago all made the Top 5 list for the second time in a row.

### Which OEM brand has the best resale value?\*



For a third year in a row, Airstream took the top spot when it comes to resale value. Tiffin rose one spot, to take second place on the Top 5 list, tying with Winnebago. Both Winnebago and Grand Design were new to the list this year.



PRESENTS

# PASSING THRU



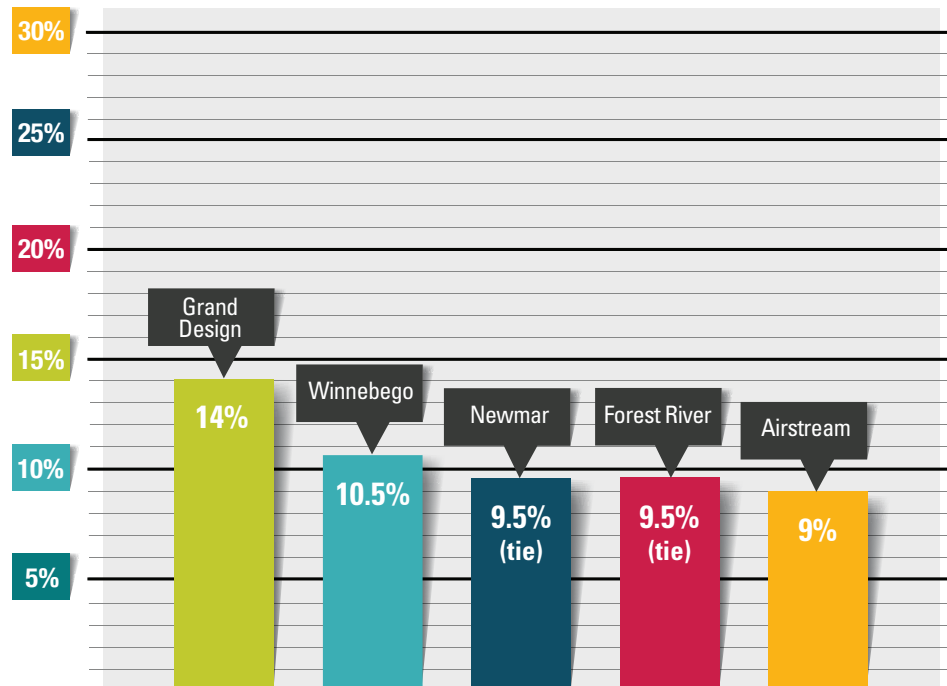
It's kind of about working on yourself.



SCAN TO WATCH



### Which OEM has the best PDI?\*



Grand Design rose to the top of the list this year, up from second place last year. Airstream and Forest River made the Top 5 list for a third straight time, while Newmar and Winnebago are new to the list this year.

\* Top 5 Survey response

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# A New Era of RVing?

By Bob Zagami

**THOR and Winnebago debut electric RV concepts at the Tampa RV SuperShow, possibly signaling the industry's future.**



PHOTOS BY BOB ZAGAMI



**THOR President and CEO Bob Martin (left) discusses the development of the company's two electric-powered concept RVs at an invitation-only event during the RV SuperShow in Tampa. Pictured with Martin are Todd Woelfer (center), chief operating officer, and Joseph Hjelmaker, chief innovation officer, who also offered details regarding the vehicles.**

**TAMPA** – THOR Industries and Winnebago separately debuted what the future of electric-powered RVs may look like at January's 2022 Florida RV SuperShow. And while representatives for THOR and Winnebago declined to offer a timetable on when these technologies could become road-ready, their debut at a major industry event would seem to indicate the future of electric vehicles may not be as far off as some may have originally anticipated.

During its invitation-only event, touted as "Adventure. Electrified," THOR Industries displayed two electric RV concepts: a motorhome and a travel trailer. Presented by THOR's leadership team, the company said its electric units were specifically designed to create a radical improvement of the RV user experience in an electrified RV world.

THOR President and CEO Bob Martin opened the event for a room full of reporters, analysts, and investors with a big smile on his face.

"There is simply nothing like this in our industry today – at all. Nothing at all," Martin said simply.

Todd Woelfer, THOR's senior vice president and COO, gave an overview of how THOR Industries got to where the company is today with this innovative technology – through the company's Innovative Technology Center.

Literally starting with that blank piece of paper, the company designed these products from the ground up, according to Woelfer.

**THOR's towable electrified offering is a 22-foot Airstream travel trailer, dubbed the eStream. It is built on THOR's exclusive high-voltage electric chassis, with two drive motors over the wheels. THOR representatives said the trailer dramatically reduces loss of range for electric tow vehicles and improves gas mileage for traditional tow vehicles.**





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**THOR's electric Class B motorhome concept, dubbed the Thor Vision Vehicle (TVV), is built on an electric chassis co-developed with Roush. With range-extending technologies, including an integrated fuel cell, the motorhome has a range of up to 300 miles, according to THOR.**

*“This all-electric motorhome concept provides a window into the future of the growing RV market and demonstrates our commitment to developing all-electric options.”*

**– Ashis Bhattacharya, senior vice president of business development, advanced technology and enterprise marketing at Winnebago Industries**

“This innovation will reshape the industry. This innovation will reshape THOR,” he said.

The Airstream 22-foot travel trailer concept, named eStream, is built on THOR's exclusive high-voltage electric chassis. Powered by a proprietary system, THOR representatives said the trailer dramatically reduces loss of range for electric tow vehicles and improves gas mileage for traditional tow vehicles.

The eStream has two drive motors over the wheels and a sensor at the front that aligns the trailer with the tow vehicle, and it simply follows the car, SUV or truck. In fact, users don't need a weight distribution hitch with this product, and they can tow it with any vehicle they may have.

As a side benefit, thanks to its drive motors, THOR said the Airstream eStream trailer can be detached and remotely moved around a campsite, which could make maneuvering easier.

Meanwhile, the Class B motorhome concept, dubbed the Thor Vision Vehicle (TVV), is built on an electric chassis co-developed with Roush. The TVV motorhome includes a number of unique elements designed to maximize chassis performance. Range-extending technologies, including integrated fuel cell components, enable a range of up to 300 miles – well within the average non-stop travel distance of most RV users.

Both the Vision motorhome and the Airstream eStream travel trailer can stay off grid for a week or more, never needing an electrical hook up or a generator, according to company representatives.

The Vision motorhome has 27 new innovations in the aerodynamic design and function of the product. Built on the Ford Transit 3500 and enhanced fuel cell integration give the coach a best-in-class 300-mile range.

The sleek exterior features rounded corners all around, new front and rear end enhancements, an enclosed 16-foot awning



**HONORED?  
YEP.**

**SATISFIED?  
NOPE.**

This magazine recently surveyed RV dealers for their opinion on manufacturer quality. Responding dealers, on the front lines of the RV business, ranked Winnebago #1 or #2 in a number of key categories, including Class A, B and C motorhome quality.

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and a custom designed storage system at the rear of the coach that will literally “hang” anything on it. And users can place an electric bike or a kayak inside the coach.

In line with THOR’s sustainability goals, many things on the inside of this trailer are manufactured with recycled materials, such as the countertop, floor and the sofa.

Meanwhile, Martin noted that many of the technologies incorporated into its two concept electric RVs have applications that can be used now to improve conventional RVs.

“The exciting thing is that we don’t have to wait for the release of these RVs to take advantage of the innovative technologies we have shown here today,” he said. “If you took the shell of the Vision motorhome and put it on a conventional gas chassis, it would improve fuel mileage by 20 percent. Incorporating the axle along with the exclusive BMW battery packs will regenerate electricity that is transferred to an electric truck or tow vehicle. However, that technology, when coupled with a car, SUV or gas truck, will make the driver feel as if they are not towing anything and allows for independent handling without any vehicle attached to it.”

### Winnebago Touts e-RV

For its part, Winnebago Industries unveiled the e-RV motorhome at the Tampa show. The reveal of the all-electric, zero-emissions Class B concept motorhome was two years in the making by the company’s Advanced Technology Group, which is charged with identifying and developing emerging technologies for application within future products and services in the company’s various business units.

The e-RV is built on the proven on the Ford Transit platform, using the vehicle’s body, chassis and suspension. To power the coach, Winnebago partnered with Loveland, Colo.-based Lightning eMotors, builder of the Lightning Electric Transit passenger van that gets up to 170 miles per charge.



**Also at the Tampa show, Winnebago debuted its all-electric, zero-emissions Class B concept motorhome, dubbed the e-RV. It is built on the proven Ford Transit platform, using the vehicle’s body, chassis and suspension. It is powered with an electric powertrain from Lightning eMotors. As with the concept vehicles from THOR, the e-RV has all of the comforts of a traditional RV.**



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*“We don’t have to wait for the release of these RVs to take advantage of the innovative technologies we have shown here today.”*

**– THOR President and CEO Bob Martin**

The e-RV is powered by an 86-kilowatt-hour lithium-ion battery pack that Winnebago expects would yield about 125 miles per charge. While that range is limited, Winnebago notes that its research showed that 54 percent of RV owners prefer keeping daily drives “to about 200 miles.”

“This all-electric motorhome concept provides a window into the future of the growing RV market and demonstrates our commitment to developing all-electric options that will contribute to a more sustainable, energy-efficient line of products for our customers,” Ashis Bhattacharya, senior vice president of business development, advanced technology and enterprise marketing at Winnebago Industries, said in prepared remarks following the e-RV’s debut.

As the technology continues to evolve, Winnebago said it

believes the e-RV’s range will continue to increase. For those users who would need to recharge, Winnebago says the e-RV’s pack could be plugged in at home, at a campsite or at a high-speed public charger, where it could be ready to roll again in as little as 45 minutes.

Like THOR’s electric RV concepts, the Winnebago e-RV has environmentally friendly features beyond its powertrain. Specifically, it is equipped with high-efficiency appliances that minimize energy demand and it uses sustainable materials like rubberized cork for flooring and wool to enhance thermal and wall insulation.

Winnebago President and CEO Mike Happe said, “We are proud to continue our innovation legacy with the reveal of the e-RV concept vehicle.” **RVZ**



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Jeremy Buckmeier, Freightliner RV and commercial bus product manager, and (in back) Steve Barbour, OEM account manager, are pictured next to an S2RV chassis at the 2022 Florida RV SuperShow in Tampa. The company's Super C chassis is finding growing favor with RV OEMs, most recently Tiffin.

# Emphasizing the 'Custom' in FCCC

By Mike Harbour



**Living up to its name, Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp. has created chassis tailored to the needs of the new Tiffin Allegro Bay and Forest River Charleston.**

**T**ravel trailers still have the lion's share of the RV market and the mystique of van life has certainly propelled Class B sales, but Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp. (FCCC) is ensuring the diesel coach segment isn't being left behind.

Case in point: The new-for-2022 Allegro Bay from Tiffin Motorhomes. Based on FCCC's innovative S2RV platform, the striking unit is the first Super C for the OEM. Billed as "adventure-ready," the Allegro Bay represents a new direction for Red Bay, Ala.-based Tiffin, long known for its plush Class A coaches.

"What's great about the Super C market is, not only did we have the product at the right time for someone looking at a larger, C-type vehicle, but the market has exploded, and it's grown significantly over the past several years," says Bryan Henke, FCCC's product marketing manager.

Buyers for Super C's tend to be a bit younger than those who purchase Class A diesel units, according to Henke. They also want something more than a typical Class C – even those based on the popular Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis – so they look to the bigger coaches.

"There's a perception that a Class C is easier to drive because it's more like sitting in your car," says Jeremy Buckmeier, RV and commercial bus product manager for Gaffney, S.C.-based FCCC. "That perception has really opened up the eyes of people to what

they think they have the ability to drive. That's a big driver to the growth."

Given that Jayco, Renegade and Entegra already offer models based on the S2RV, Tiffin – which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year and has been an FCCC partner for more than 25 years – was determined to make the new Allegro Bay a unique model, according to Henke.

"Tiffin did not just want to build a 'same-as' unit," he says. "It's not just going to be pulling into an RV park and sitting. This is for people with big trailers for horses or motorcycles. Tiffin wanted to make sure they could accommodate that with towing and easing of hitching and unhitching, along with the ability to go off-road in a muddy or a sandy area."

Tiffin – a unit of THOR Industries since late 2020 – and FCCC, part of Daimler Truck North America, started the Allegro Bay project with a clean slate, according to Buckmeier.

"It was really, 'Alright, what kind of features do we need in this product? What's available today?'" he says. "'What are things that we really need in this coach? What do we need to develop from the chassis side and what do we need to develop from the body side?'"

Powered by a Cummins B6.7 with 360 horsepower and 800 foot-pounds of torque, an Allison 3000-series six-speed transmission and a GVWR of 33,000 pounds, the 38-foot Allegro Bay



PHOTOS BY LORI BALLARD

**Tiffin's new Allegro Bay motorhome was a hit with attendees at the Tampa show. Freightliner created a customized S2RV chassis for the Allegro Bay, offering Tractech NoSPIN differential, which is designed to minimize or eliminate tire wheel spin in adverse conditions such as mud and snow.**





The Allegro Bay has a spacious feel thanks to its three slides, with two of those located in the galley and one in the bedroom. The coach features a residential-style refrigerator and many of the other comforts of home in an upscale setting.



Freightliner's S2RV chassis caters to RVers who want the power and performance of a diesel, particularly when it comes to towing, without the cockpit of a convention Class A motorhome.



A show attendee examines an XCR chassis at Freightliner's exhibit at the Tampa show. Freightliner has created a modified XCR specifically for Forest River's new 2022 Charleston, a 36-foot highline coach that represents that manufacturer's new top Class A diesel offering.

certainly impresses – especially considering its 12,000-pound tow rating. Henke says that's only part of the chassis story.

"The differential is totally different. It's an Eaton Tractech NoSPIN differential. If someone goes in the mud or goes in the sand, they're not going to sit there and spin like they would normally do," he says. "We also have a feature so customers can simply flick a switch and unhitch from those big trailers, making it easier for them."

The Allegro Bay, which debuted in January at the Florida RV SuperShow in Tampa, also comes equipped with LED headlights and a rear fuel tank to allow for generous pass-through storage, among other features. It's available in two floorplans; one with a lavatory and shower amidships and the other with a distinctive bath-and-a-half arrangement. Each has three slides.

"We've seen 200-plus-percent growth in the S2RV over the last year and a half. We have more growth projected this year," Buckmeier says. "Body builders that are planning to launch some products this year are a little limited on supply chain right now, but we fully expect by midyear other developments to be done. It's just a huge growth segment."

#### New Charleston Coach Built on Custom XCR Chassis

Another FCCC chassis, the XCR, sits underneath Forest River Diesel's new 2022 Charleston, a 36-foot highline coach that represents that manufacturer's new top Class A diesel offering. In development for several years, the motorhome also debuted at the Florida show.



*“What’s great about the Super C market is, not only did we have the product at the right time for someone looking at a larger, C-type vehicle, but the market has exploded, and it’s grown significantly over the past several years.”*

**– Bryan Henke, FCCC product marketing manager**

“The typical 36-foot coach is not historically associated to a high-end product. There is certainly a market for that,” Buckmeier says. “You’ve got people that have driven 45-foot coaches and either parks have changed, restricting the size of coaches going in, or the owner’s comfort level with driving a big coach may have changed. Maybe the kids that were traveling with them aren’t traveling with them anymore. This 36-foot high-end coach is a segment that we worked with them on identifying and they’ve done a lot of research and background. We’ve done a lot of research and background and truly believe this is a segment that has great potential growth to it.”

The XCR stands out, literally, because of its raised rail, according to Buckmeier. It’s a design that allows for a flat floor throughout the coach, as well as providing more space in the pass-through basement storage compartments.

The Charleston is powered by a 450-horsepower Cummins I9; torque is a stout 1,250 foot-pounds sent through an Allison 3000-series six-speed transmission. Towing capacity is 15,000 pounds and there’s a three-stage engine brake, as well as a 100-gallon fuel tank with dual filling ports.

“They have loaded this thing with horsepower, torque, towing capacity, an engine brake, and a large fuel tank,” Buckmeier says. “They’ve also put our full-fledged RoadWatch safety feature system on it. What we offer for bells and whistles, it’s pretty much loaded with those.”

The Charleston, so far available only in a single floorplan with three slides, also has FCCC’s BrakeSync, a feature for towed vehicles the company began offering last year, Henke says. It’s the only factory-installed and factory-warrantied supplemental braking system available on luxury RVs in the market, he adds.

Customers who chose the Charleston also will get the XCR’s optional independent front suspension by ZF, FCCC’s exclusive V-Ride Rear Suspension System, a side radiator configuration and even Bendix air disc brakes front and rear, a feature not seen on many highline coaches.

“This thing is short and sweet and it’s going to handle like a race car,” Buckmeier says. “Buyers will love the performance. They’re going to understand what their cars have, which is four-wheel disc brakes, so I think the buyers will appreciate and recognize that.”

#### **RoadWatch Becoming Standard on FCCC Models**

Meanwhile, RoadWatch, FCCC’s suite of safety systems, is increasingly becoming standard on nearly all of the company’s chassis. It features adaptive cruise control, collision mitigation, electronic stability control and automatic traction control. There’s even Mobileye Camera Detection, which senses headway warning

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REV RV Group's American Eagle luxury coach at the Tampa show had signage in front touting, "Safety Should Never Be Optional." For 2022, Freightliner's RoadWatch safety features are standard on most of its chassis.

*"There's a perception that a Class C is easier to drive because it's more like sitting in your car. That perception has really opened up the eyes of people to what they think they have the ability to drive. That's a big driver to the growth."*

**– Jeremy Buckmeier, FCCC RV and commercial bus product manager**



Joe Snyder (standing at left), marketing and training manager for FCCC, guides a show attendee through the various RoadWatch safety features found on Freightliner coaches via a simulator on display at the Tampa show. Those safety systems include adaptive cruise control, collision mitigation, electronic stability control and automatic traction control.

distance, provides intelligent high-beams, lane departure warnings and speed limit indicators.

"Finally, after all the preaching and the customer engagement about safety systems, this year is truly the year where there's a paradigm shift," Henke says. "You have Tiffin Motorhomes making RoadWatch standard throughout the whole fleet from the base models to the top. REV is putting a new campaign about safety systems out and they're behind it. Forest River, a major new launch, has the complete line of safety systems on this new Charleston. Newmar has always been behind this.

"You can see how everyone is fully understanding the need and the market and is now integrating it," Henke says. "Safety systems now are becoming standard features, not just a nicety."

The gradual popularity of RoadWatch reminds Buckmeier of TPMS, the system that monitors tire pressure, when it was introduced in the RV industry a few years ago.

"We had very little penetration," he says. "It's still not standard for all body builders, but every year, we add another one here and there that have made it standard across their product line. RoadWatch is the same thing."

There's one aspect of the new technology Henke thinks will especially please customers.

"Adaptive cruise, which is part of RoadWatch, makes the driving experience phenomenal," he says. "It's a challenge to drive in today's market out on the road with a big vehicle, but adaptive cruise, when you're in those environments, is so relaxing."

That's an important consideration for dealers to remember, Henke adds, because RoadWatch can help prevent accidents and that makes driving large motorhomes more comfortable to customers that may have previously only driven something much smaller. It's an assertion Buckmeier agrees with wholeheartedly.

"How many times do you hear customers say they can only drive about 200 miles a day because they're so fatigued and stressed? These features all equate to customers feeling more comfortable and ultimately allowing them, if they desire, to drive a little bit more. They're more relaxed, they're not tense, and it's a lot safer that way, too." **RV2**



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# Q&A with Carefree's Eric Cannon



PHOTOS BY RV PRO

By Ronnie Wendt



**The new president of Carefree of Colorado discusses his vision for the company moving forward, amid a market rife with supply chain challenges and inflationary pressures.**

**I**n the RV industry, those who hold leadership roles often come up from sales. However, Eric Cannon, the new president of Carefree of Colorado took a different path.

His road to Broomfield, Colo.-based Carefree included an education in mechanical engineering from Penn State, which led to jobs with greater leadership responsibilities, culminating in his appointment a few months ago to his current position. Every role Cannon held over a 22-year career appears ready-made for his future at Carefree of Colorado, which develops, manufactures, markets and sells shade products and accessories.

In his first position out of college, Cannon joined Sylvania Lighting, which produces LED lighting solutions – a popular addition to today's RVs. Initially, the company rotated him through different manufacturing plants and varied engineering roles in design and manufacturing.

Then, Cannon moved to Sylvania Lighting's automotive lighting plant in Hillsboro, N.H., where his department made halogen capsules for vehicle manufacturers. In that role, he trained in Lean manufacturing and Six Sigma. He also worked in a variety of plants, leading varied manufacturing processes, including powder manufacturing and metals.

While at Sylvania, Cannon attended night school to earn his MBA, which he completed in 2006. Cannon then left Sylvania to work for Masonite as a process engineer, traveling to the door and window manufacturing company's international plants to help improve their processes.

He then headed Masonite's fiberglass plant in Tennessee, leaving this position a few years later to join Powerex Inc., a compressor packager that builds turnkey systems for industries that require clean compressed air. Cannon entered the company as vice president of operations, then became business unit manager for its



**Eric Cannon (at right) was named president of Carefree of Colorado in late 2021. He is pictured at the company's offices in Broomfield, Colo., with (from left to right) Tammi Waddell director of sales; Wyatt Neerings, vice president of operations; and Richard Reynolds, vice president of engineering.**





Carefree is a premier provider of awnings and shade products to the RV industry. The company has added shifts to keep up with demand.

industrial business unit. In this role, he led an operational team for production, an engineering group, the sales organization, and managed budgets and revenue.

Powerex is a division of the Scott Fetzer Co., which also owns Carefree of Colorado. So, the transition to Carefree was a natural one.

Recently, *RV PRO* spoke Cannon to learn more about his goals for his new role and what he sees for the industry in 2022. His responses have been lightly edited for style and space.



**RV PRO: What attracted you to Carefree of Colorado?**

**Cannon:** The opportunity to lead an established business with great products and great customer relationships appealed to me. We have a talented team that is focused on taking care of our customers. That offers a solid base from which to drive success. I'm hoping to build upon what currently exists. I believe we can leverage our team, products and engineering capabilities to do that.

**RV PRO: How will your work as an engineer help you in your new role?**

**Cannon:** Engineering, design and product development is one thing you look for in a healthy business. Are you designing new things for the market? Are you innovating?

Having an engineering background gives me the technical aptitude to talk intelligently to our engineering teams about the things they're working on, while also being able to drive a successful business. I've worked in nearly 70 different manufacturing plants

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Carefree had a large presence at the recent NTP-STAG Expo. The company had a large exhibit on the show floor and it sponsored the keynote speaker on the second day of the show.



Kevin Jastrem, aftermarket sales manager for Carefree, shares details on the company's latest product offerings during an educational seminar at the NTP-STAG Expo.



The leadership team members are pictured inside a building Carefree has secured near its existing facility to provide extra warehouse space for its awning products.

around the world. That work gives me a broad perspective on techniques and ways to improve. Manufacturing works closely with Carefree operations and supply chain groups to help us address the challenges we have as a business.

**RV PRO: How are today's supply chain issues affecting Carefree of Colorado?**

**Cannon:** 2020 was a challenging year, but when we tipped over into 2021, the dominoes started to fall. Ports started to back up as demand spiked everywhere.

One thing we look at in those situations is where we source from and taking adequate steps to ensure we have enough material to build products. We try to be as proactive as possible to get more inventory on our shelves, so we have a buffer to meet demand. But everybody is doing this.

The options we have are to increase our inventory levels, to look for alternative options for supply, and then to consider our product designs and engineering opportunities to change materials so we can get products to customers. That's what I'm doing now at Carefree to address supply chain issues.

**RV PRO: What are your top priorities in the months to come?**

**Cannon:** The RV industry exploded over the last two years. People decided they want to travel, but they want to do it away from other people, and they started investing in RVs. The entire industry started growing and it hasn't subsided.

Carefree works with OEMs. As they sell more RVs, demand for our products goes up. We're working hard to satisfy their needs. We also have a large aftermarket channel where we sell a lot of products. People also are upgrading their existing RVs, adding and repairing old awnings. We're supporting those efforts as well.

We have worked over the past year to increase our capacity. The labor crunch has complicated that. Everybody's competing for the same people. We are developing new ways to attract employees to our company. As I look toward 2022, one of my main goals is increasing our capacity so that we can meet demand without sacrificing quality.

**RV PRO: Will you add new plants or new shifts to increase capacity?**

**Cannon:** We have already added shifts. We have a three-shift operation. But we are working to staff those shifts right now. We also rented local warehouse space for material overflow, so that we're not as congested here.

“We have a talented team that is focused on taking care of our customers. That offers a solid base from which to drive success. I’m hoping to build upon what currently exists.”

I will work with the operational team to identify the best ways to manage this change as we go forward. We’ve looked at outsourcing or finding local warehouses to help with space needs so we can operate more efficiently.

**RV PRO: What kinds of new products or product launches might OEMs and dealers expect from the company in the future?**

**Cannon:** That’s something I’m still digging into. We recently hired a new vice president of engineering. His name is Rich Reynolds and he has an extensive product development background. He will give us more horsepower to help us refine our processes for new product development and put more rigor into the processes we have. Rich and I working to determine what makes the most sense for his team to work on.

**RV PRO: The RV industry has seen younger buyers and first-time buyers enter the market. What is Carefree doing to appeal to these new demographics?**

**Cannon:** We recently toured an RV show in Denver. We saw that design aesthetics are important to younger generations. We are looking at our products and trying to incorporate that into

them. We also noticed the smaller, teardrop-shaped towables that they often favor need shade products, too. How do we incorporate shade into those products to create more usable outdoor space? Those are the things we’re considering from a product perspective.

The other piece is marketing. We are considering how to better market our products in the aftermarket and with third-party resellers. We also are looking at changing our marketing and advertising to reach the new demographic.

**RV PRO: What do you expect for the RV industry in the years ahead? Do you expect the boom to continue?**

**Cannon:** Everything that I’ve seen tells us we’ve got at least another solid year and that 2022 will be bigger than 2021. Carefree expects growth this year.

But the industry is historically cyclical. RVs are a luxury. When people have more money and the economy does well, they invest in RVs. When the economy isn’t going so well and there’s more unemployment, people pull back on those expenditures.

But we’ve still got some growth to realize over the next few years. Beyond that, it’s anybody’s guess. We need to be prepared to manage our way through downturns as they arrive. **RVF**



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# Experience. Engage. Expand.



By Bradley Worrell

The three-word theme of this year's NTP-STAG Expo had special meaning, as the distributor sought to prepare its dealers for the year ahead as signs of normalcy return.



PHOTOS BY BRADLEY WORRELL UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

NTP-STAG President Bill Rogers addresses dealers during the Tuesday luncheon. Rogers said the distributor is stocking up on inventory and adding warehouse space in order to meet the needs of dealers. (Photo courtesy of NTP-STAG)

LAS VEGAS – This year's NTP-STAG Expo for dealers could be summed up in three words: Experience, Engage and Expand.

"I always say *experience* is what you get when you don't get what you want – but it's also turning something you don't want into a positive, because at least you got some experience," said NTP-STAG President Bill Rogers.

That's a definition that NTP-STAG's dealer attendees can likely identify with, given how COVID-19 harmed their businesses early in the pandemic amid government-enforced business lockdowns, but ultimately proved beneficial for most dealers as Americans bought RVs in record numbers last year, seeking to recreate safely.

Specifically in the case of NTP-STAG's Expo, Rogers said the distributor wanted to use its show prior to the coming selling season to give its dealers a meaningful *experience* by offering top-notch educational seminars from vendors, plus its own lineup of RV University PRO speakers, including nationally recognized social media expert Corey Perlman, as well as marketing and customer experience pro Kelly McDonald.

"Our thought was to get the education back on track, and so a lot of that was (directed) to the educational portion of the events," Rogers said. "And obviously, networking and seeing people they haven't seen in a long time – vendors and their fellow dealers – would be the *engagement* aspect.

"The final element is *expand*, which could involve taking on new product lines or identifying areas of service or business growth," he said.







Dealers stream onto the show floor on the first day of the NTP-STAG Expo, sponsored by Airxcel. NTP-STAG President Bill Rogers said vendors and dealers were happy to be able to attend an in-person event. (Photo courtesy of NTP-STAG)

As for this year's attending dealers, Rogers said that based upon conversations he had with them on the first day of the two-day show – which took place in late January at the Caesars Forum in the heart of Las Vegas – they were happy to be able to attend the in-person show.

“A really strong, favorable response is what I've been getting from all of them,” he said. “So, everybody I've seen here and talked to so far has been the same: very positive and very thankful to us for pulling it together.”

### Not Quite Back to Normal

The number of exhibitors at this year's Expo was roughly on par with previous years, but Rogers acknowledged the number of dealers was down a bit compared to previous years, representing the lingering aftereffects of COVID.

“We're not back to full strength yet, but it's definitely an increase from last year,” he said.

“I think most of the suppliers are here with their regular teams. But the Canadian (dealers) are usually a big crew at our shows

and they were absent completely last year. And this year, it's still a small participation rate. I think that with all the uncertainty about their ability to get back into Canada, they just continue to be locked out.”

Another factor also is likely at play for the somewhat lower turnout, according to Rogers. He said that some U.S. dealerships may have sent less people to this year's Expo than in past years simply because they are already busy serving customers, as early indications are pointing to another very strong year for RV sales.

What was immediately clear during the show was that attending dealers came ready to buy, according to Rogers.

“I think there is a bit of a stock-up mindset,” he said of dealers. In addition to dealers wanting to make sure they have inventory on-hand for customers during the busy summer selling season, “I think the kind of caution about inflation is on their minds as well. I think they recognize that prices aren't going down,” he said.

“And fortunately, we're pretty good on inventory – we're probably in the best position we've been in since the pandemic,” he added.



(Photo courtesy of Caesars Entertainment)





**Dealers crowd around the Go Power! exhibit to learn about the company's latest solar power products. Solar power products are drawing increased interest from dealers, according to NTP-STAG.**



**RV University speaker Kelly McDonald engages with a dealer during one of her two educational seminars, entitled: "How to Market to, Sell to and Serve People Not like You."**



**It was standing-room-only at the educational seminar for Pace International, which was touting its new pay-as-you-go Wi-Fi product for the RV market.**

In a luncheon presentation for attendees on the first day of the show, Rogers told dealers that the company has \$400 million in inventory and 185,000 stock keeping units (SKUs).

As for NTP-STAG's ability to overcome continued supply chain issues, Rogers said, "It's getting so much better, but it's still not where it was before (COVID). And there are certain product categories that I would say still seem to be problematic."

As with the automobile industry, challenges continue to exist regarding obtaining products requiring computer chips, as well as any items that are being shipped from overseas.

"Anything that is pretty chip intensive would be more problematic. We've actually seen some products go back to some earlier versions of less chip-intensive models to make them available, especially in some of the appliance areas," Rogers said. "Most of our suppliers are U.S. based, but if they are importing something there are problems, because they can't get it on a container or they are paying a fortune to do so."

### **Doing Its Part to Help**

For its part, NTP-STAG is taking actions to support its dealer members by doing what it can to stock up on inventory and talking with suppliers about lead times to assist with planning efforts, according to Rogers. Meanwhile, the distributor is adding warehouse capacity to store products.

Specifically, Rogers said NTP-STAG has opened a new warehouse in the Orlando area to better serve dealers in the southern part of the Sunshine State. Additionally, it has expanded the warehouse capacity of its facility in Spokane, Wash., to better meet demand in the Pacific Northwest.

The distributor now has eight warehouses nationwide, in addition to multiple cross-dock facilities.





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The Un-Duz-It booth saw a constant stream of traffic during the show, as dealers were interested in learning more about the company's line of professional-strength cleaning products.



As in past years, NTP-STAG devoted sizeable exhibit space to overlanding products. NTP-STAG believes that such products could represent an expanded market opportunity for dealers.



Industry veteran Rosie Hirsch shares details on Camp Casual camping supplies with an attendee visiting the JR Products' exhibit.

Meanwhile, Rogers noted that NTP-STAG offers a plethora of tools to help dealers sell more aftermarket parts and accessories, including offering to do store sets, providing digital content solutions through its Marketing Garage program, and offering the ability to provide dealers with websites through a third-party provider, to name just a few.

Additionally, NTP-STAG continues to expose its dealers to products from ancillary markets that could represent expansion opportunities for them, such as retailing marine products, truck accessories and overlanding equipment. As in past Expo events, NTP-STAG dedicate sizeable exhibit space to its Overlanding Experience display, featuring vehicles and products tailored for self-contained outdoor adventure travel. Accessories included items such as rooftop tents and modular racking systems for pickups and other rugged vehicles.

"I think there's fewer exhibitors here on overlanding, but more meaningful exhibitors, if that makes sense," Rogers said. Specifically, he noted some of those products on display could be outfitted on rugged Class B motorhomes or towing vehicles for trailers, so they are not necessarily far removed from the mainstay RV market.

"And I think we'll just continue to keep displaying it because, as we talked about the *expand*, I think it's natural for the RV dealers to be in the overlanding business. And a lot of the OEs ... are making a lot more overlanding-type vehicles. And, they're probably one of the more popular sale items in terms of Class B's, I think. The Sprinter-based type products are selling very well on dealer lots.

"The fact that they (OEMs) are building them, and that there are third parties upfitting vehicles, I think it's a natural fit," he said of offering overlanding products. "And camping is kind of a natural for dealers, too."





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During the show, attendees had the opportunity to meet Amber Balcaen, NASCAR's national ARCA Menards series driver, courtesy of supplier ICON Direct.



A dealer converses with a representative for Bulletproof Hitches about the company's towing products. Bulletproof was one of a number of new exhibitors at this year's show.



David Miller (right), national sales manager for Cofair, shares details about the company's RV roof repair products with show attendees.

Rogers acknowledged that, with many dealers scrambling to meet demand in their business, now may not be the time they want to expand into new categories, but he said it could make sense down the road.

### Expectations for 2022

Looking toward the future, Rogers said the RV industry is in a period of transition, partly spurred by increasing government-created environmental regulations and partly resulting from a move by OEMs toward electrified RVs.

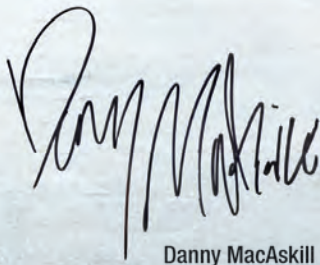
"Definitely. I mean, the makeup of the products will be much different," he said. "California passed a law that is outlawing generators. That's a big part of the RV world – on-board generators that Onan makes or (other) portable generators.

"There's no question things are going to change. So, we'll be carrying whatever the substitute for that is – probably a battery pack of some sort or more solar," he added. "I think things are already shifting to solar setups in RVs and inverter sales and some of the power management stuff that goes with it.

"And then, in terms of the power plant that drives it (an RV), if it's (an electric Ford) F-150 or F-250 Lightning, then it's probably not going to change too much in terms of the trailer or camper, but it might take different accessories and different things," Rogers said. "In terms of cargo management, towing, you're still going to need all that. I'm assuming the EVs that come out will probably have enough power to continue to use some of the existing towing equipment that is out there already."





  
Danny MacAskill



*Mountain bike and street trial professional and Eberspächer brand ambassador **Danny MacAskill**: known from the YouTube hit "Wee Day Out"*

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Supplier BPRO's exhibit, with a Kangaroo display, paid tribute to the company's Australian roots.



Lippert had a large display at the NTP-STAG Expo, which attracted a large cohort of RV dealers.

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Meanwhile, more change may come when RV manufacturers like Winnebago and THOR Industries – which recently debuted concept electrified RVs – move forward with assembly line versions of those products. That could have an impact upon which specific aftermarket parts and accessories are best suited for those units, according to Rogers.

Still, as far as the general outlook for the RV industry, Rogers pointed to a recent survey NTP-STAG did of a few hundred dealers that showed those dealers are overwhelming optimistic in their outlook for the year ahead. Additionally, he said there is reason to believe the outlook for the RV aftermarket in particular will be positive.

“With so many units that have been sold in the last couple of years, I think it will be a very strong year for the aftermarket for a few years to come,” he said. “So, I anticipate another good year.” **RV2**



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A large, golden, five-pointed star with a metallic sheen is centered in the upper half of the page. Inside the star, the text "RV PRO" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Below the star, a black banner with white text reads "Best New Products PARTS AND ACCESSORIES". At the bottom of the star, the year "2022" is written in a large, white, outlined font. The background features a stylized sunburst pattern in shades of blue and green, with a silhouette of a forest of evergreen trees at the bottom.

RV PRO

**Best New Products**  
PARTS AND ACCESSORIES

**2022**

**RV PRO's take on some of the most innovative products to debut in 2022.**

**W**hat do a multi-purpose outdoor grill, a steering control product, a pay-as-you-go Wi-Fi hotspot, a gasless

**By Bradley Worrell, Jordan Benschop, Tony Kindelspire and Chris Hemer**

500-watt generator, a manual-slide fifth wheel hitch, a cell phone signal booster, an auto detect battery charger and a portable A/C system for outdoor use all have in common?

Answer: They are all winners of this year's *RV PRO* Best New Products 2022: Parts & Accessories. This marks *RV PRO*'s eighth year of recognizing outstanding aftermarket products and accessories.

Of the dozens of aftermarket parts and accessories the magazine's intrepid editorial staff reviewed, the list was greatly narrowed to just eight Best New Products.

As always, choosing best new aftermarket product winners is admittedly subjective. In addition to having a certain "wow" factor, top elements *RV PRO* considered when evaluating products included that their ability to solve a problem and that they were unique in some notable way. Beyond that, *RV PRO* always seeks to showcase a variety of different types of products with these awards.



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# Pace International TravFi Journey1

Pace International made a big splash in the RV market a few years back when it partnered with DISH Outdoors to provide pay-as-you-go satellite TV service to thousands of RVers who wanted to access their favorite movies and shows no matter where they traveled.

While grateful for that service, Pace's customers quickly came up with another request: "How can I get internet when I'm traveling?" says Sam Schell, the company's senior vice president of business development.

It took Pace some time and effort to develop, but the Rochester, Minn.-based company now has an answer for those customers via its recently released TravFi Journey1 mobile Wi-Fi LTE hotspot, offering pay-as-you-go internet service.

One of the most appealing things about TravFi is that its virtual SIM technology is designed to automatically find and connect to the best possible signal among the major carriers: AT&T, T-Mobile and Verizon. That's particularly useful given that RVers by nature travel about, and certain carriers are stronger than their rivals in various parts of the country, says Schell.

"That allows our product to switch services and providers on the fly," he says. "The device will sense which service is stronger and switch towers and change services. The result is the strongest signal and the fastest signal in an area."

Also beneficial to customers: TravFi offers a wide range of 30-day high-speed data plans, from 2 gigabytes all the way up to 800 gigabytes, with fees ranging from \$19 a month to \$199 a month (plus a one-time activation fee). Users can increase or decrease their data plan as they see fit when it comes time to renew at the end of the 30-day cycle, according to Schell. The service can be de-activated when not being used.

As for the TravFi device itself, it's easy to set up and simple to use and the product is supported by Pace's award-winning RV contact center, Schell says. Dealers simply sell the TravFi to the customer and then Pace's team handles the activation, he adds.

Notably, the product is very portable and offers up to 10 hours of use on its battery charge, according to Schell.

He adds that TravFi is a brand that Pace developed and owns from the hardware to the activation through to the billing of the service and support.

In addition to handling the product activation, Pace assists its retail partners in other ways as well. Specifically, the company enforces minimum advertised pricing (MAP), which helps protect dealer profit margins, and the company offers a variety of marketing and merchandising assistance, including a handy six-pack point-of-purchase shipper.

**What impressed RV PRO:** TravFi has made pay-as-you-go internet service remarkably straightforward and easy, thanks to its ability to switch to the strongest carrier. Plus, the ability of Pace to offer varied data usage plans means there is an appropriate plan for virtually anyone.



**Sam Schell, senior vice president of business development at Pace International, is pictured with the TravFi Journey1 at the company's NTP-STAG Expo booth. Pace is offering the TravFi in convenient six-pack point-of-purchase shippers.**



# dish outdoors



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# Roadmaster Exact Center Steering Stabilizer

Along with powerful brakes, it could be argued that predictable steering is one of the most desirable traits of any vehicle chassis. RV consumers – many of whom moved directly from a passenger car or light truck into a large motorhome – tend to be alarmed by lack of steering feel, often commenting that they must make constant steering adjustments even under normal driving conditions just to keep the coach in its lane. As a result, RVers often seek aftermarket solutions that will prevent handling maladies such as lane wander, rut trucking and loose steering feel.

Vancouver, Wash.-based Roadmaster has offered its own steering stabilizer product, the Reflex, for about 20 years. However, it recently introduced a new steering stabilizer called Exact Center that the company says can prevent steering issues before they begin.



Roadmaster Vice President David Robinson is pictured holding an Exact Center at the company's exhibit at the NTP-STAG Expo. Initially available for use with Jeeps and light pickups, Roadmaster plans for a medium-size offering for trucks, as well as Class B and Class C motorhomes, and a large offering for Class A motorhomes and busses.

“Everything on the market up to this point has been reactive,” says Roadmaster Vice President David Robinson. “Traditionally, steering stabilizers consist of a specialized shock absorber that absorbs energy, and a coil spring that creates resistance to push the steering back to center. The more the steering goes off center, the more resistance the stabilizer applies – but these products don’t do anything while the vehicle is traveling in a straight line.”

By contrast, Robinson says that Exact Center consists of two opposing nitrogen-charged struts, which apply significant pneumatic pressure (the amount varies depending on the application) from either direction to keep the steering on center, preventing unpredictable handling and yielding crisp, on-center feel.

The other benefit of the Exact Center is its construction; Exact Center is only 1.250 inches in diameter, so it weighs just a fraction of other steering stabilizers. Its all-stainless-steel body and internal shaft also makes it resistant to corrosion.

The Exact Center is new to market for 2022, but will soon be offered in three-sizes for a wide range of vehicles: small for Jeeps and light



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pick-ups, medium for trucks as well as Class B and Class C motorhomes, and large for Class A motorhomes and busses.

"The primary difference between each kit is the length of the Exact Center unit, and the pressure it applies to the steering system," Robinson says. Exact Center is available with its own application-specific mounting kit (sold separately) allowing the product to bolt into place. Robinson notes that Exact Center works only on traditional steering systems; it won't work on rack-and-pinion steering or on motorhomes with independent front suspension.

The debut application for Exact Center is the Jeep Wrangler, which Roadmaster identified as one of the most important markets.

"They're very popular as a towed (dinghy) vehicle," explains Robinson. "They account for nearly 40 percent of our towed vehicle product sales."

The other reason, he says, is that Jeep Wranglers suffer from a dangerous steering condition colloquially known as "death wobble" – an uncontrollable steering oscillation that can result in a loss of control.

"Because Exact Center holds the steering on center, it greatly reduces the instances of death wobble and improves steering feel on the road," Robinson says.

**What impressed RV PRO:**

Thanks to its unique design, Exact Center offers a much more proactive approach to preventing unpredictable handling while yielding a crisp, on-center feel. As added bonuses, Exact Center weighs just a fraction of other steering stabilizers and the install process is relatively straightforward.

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# Magma Crossover Single Firebox

**RV**ers tend to love spending time outdoors, including cooking outdoors. However, traditional gas stoves generally only offer so many options when it comes to meal preparation.

However, Magma Products is offering RVers an expanded range of cooking options thanks to its Crossover Series single-burner Single Firebox. (The company also makes a two-burner Double Firebox.)

Company Vice President of Sales and Marketing Alison Garcia describes the Firebox products as modular cook systems that transform from traditional stoves to a variety of different cookers. Specifically, there is a grill top, a pizza oven top, a griddle top and a plancha top, giving RVers an array of cooking options.

Dealer reaction to the premium product was “very positive,” Garcia says. In particular, she says dealers appreciated the Firebox’s durability and good looks thanks to its stainless-steel exterior that holds up to the elements, its ease of use and cleaning thanks to a sliding drawer at the back that collects grease, and the fact that it is easy to transport thanks to its side handle and closure latch.

The Single Firebox is made of brushed 304 stainless steel with a removable stainless-steel grate and a durable, heat-resistant thermoplastic handle and controls. It features a Piezo ignition for a single-click, easy start; an innovative

altitude adjustment system designed to keep a consistent flame in different altitudes; ventilation on the front panel, providing airflow to keep the controls cool; burner access holes that allow a view of the burner and the ability to light the burner manually; and the starter control knob has a beveled base to prevent damage if bumped.

The Single Firebox accepts a 1-pound gas cylinder, which mounts to a molded plastic platform at a 35-degree angle for optimal gas flow. Or, the Firebox can make use of a 20-pound LP tank or it can hook directly to an RV gas line. The stove’s 15,000 BTU high-efficiency burner produces an ultra-clean blue flame.

A built-in wind deflector is designed to protect the Firebox’s flame in windy conditions.

In addition to its cooking options, the Firebox is notable for its fold-out food preparation shelf, which locks in place with reinforced support, and which features a 25-pound weight rating, according to Garcia.



**Magma Vice President of Sales and Marketing Alison Garcia is pictured next to the company’s Single Firebox at the NTP-STAG Expo, where the product was receiving plenty of interest from dealers.**



Also notable about the Firebox is its versatile staging options when cooking, Garcia says. Specifically, the stove can be placed on a table, it can be mounted to a quad-leg stand or it can be mounted to a 2-inch trailer receiver with a special attachment.

Lakewood, Calif.-based Magma Products has been a supplier to the marine market since 1976, but it is a fairly recent arrival to the RV market, according to Garcia. The company saw a natural crossover of

its products from the marine to the RV market and expanded its reach accordingly, Garcia says, debuting its products at this year's NTP-STAG Expo.

**What impressed RV PRO:** In a word: Versatility.

This product offers a multitude of cooking options, a range of staging options for cooking, and various LP gas options. And given that the product was originally built for the marine market, with its often harsh conditions, it's very likely to stand up to RV use.



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# Southwire Elite 500-Watt Generator

Boondockers, boaters and tailgaters alike can rejoice over Southwire's latest lineup of portable generators – especially its 500-watt offering, which topped charts as the No. 1 volume SKU in the company's Elite line of gasless power units.



Michael Conway, Southwire's national account manager, is pictured in his booth at the Northern Wholesale show. Conway says the company's Elite 500-Watt Generator (pictured below) is finding favor with dealers and customers.



Clean energy has become a top priority for many North American suppliers specialized in power supply. With a spiking number of RVers and new regulations from California environmental regulators – which will ban the sale of new gas-powered generators starting 2028 – the industry needed a solution, says Michael Conway, Southwire's national account manager.

"In talking with different product managers in the OEM space over the last couple of years, we know that traditional gas or propane generators are going to go away by-and-large in this market," says Conway.

Southwire started developing its gasless Elite units in 2020, but Conway says it was "all-hands-on-deck" last year. Power supply products need to meet both environmental standards and consumers' growing needs – such as one boondocker who needed to power a CPAP machine all night.

The company introduced four different units to the market, but the highest consumer interest was found in its "bread and butter" – the 500-watt product. It could power a CPAP machine through the night, Conway says, along with run a TV and other appliances, from a box weighing less than 13 pounds.

"It's a really great product that helps the consumer have power at their fingertips, but also regenerate that power quickly," Conway says.

The units have six-way charging capabilities, with a USB-C port in addition to ports for solar panels or AC/DC power sources. Users can expect the 500-watt unit to charge from dead to 100 percent in under three hours.

"It's a nice, compact footprint that allows a consumer to have a UL-listed lithium battery pack with a pure sine wave inverter and solar controller all in a compact, portable package," Conway says.

The generator's built-in solar controller allows for connection to any solar panel. However, to make things easier, Southwire launched a kit, including its popular 500-watt generator and a new 200-watt portable solar panel that weighs less than 8 pounds.

"We're already getting ready to launch a couple more SKUs this late spring or early summer, for accessories to go with these (Elite) units," Conway says.

**What impressed RV PRO:** Southwire tackled a demand for clean energy and versatility with consumer needs at the forefront – a necessity for times like 2022. The 500-watt generator offers the perfect size and power supply for off-grid travels and everyday tasks. The unit's charging capabilities are especially impressive.





# Demco Recon Slider Fifth Wheel Hitch

A few years ago, at the request of its customers, Demco developed what it calls its Recon Slider hitch. Continuing in that series, its latest product is the Recon Slider Fifth Wheel Hitch.

When it was first introduced, the Recon hitch line became immensely popular, according to Demco Territory Manager Brad Vander Pol. And that popularity led to its dealers wanting different models of that same product, so they could reach more of their customers. That innovation is what led to the 2022 version, Vander Pol says: the Recon Slider in a manual format.

"A lot of hitches – the status quo hitches, if you will – were kind of heavy," he says. "So, we looked at different designs and came out with the Recon. A

year later, they wanted us to come out with a hitch that would go over a 2-5/16-inch ball, to cover that particular market. And then those same customers, with the success of that hitch, they said, 'Would you be willing to come out with a lightweight manual sliding hitch as well, based on that Recon frame?'"

But no sooner had the company's engineers started working on it when COVID hit, which disrupted that timeline. Supply chain issues further disrupted its development, so the product is now finally hitting the marketplace.

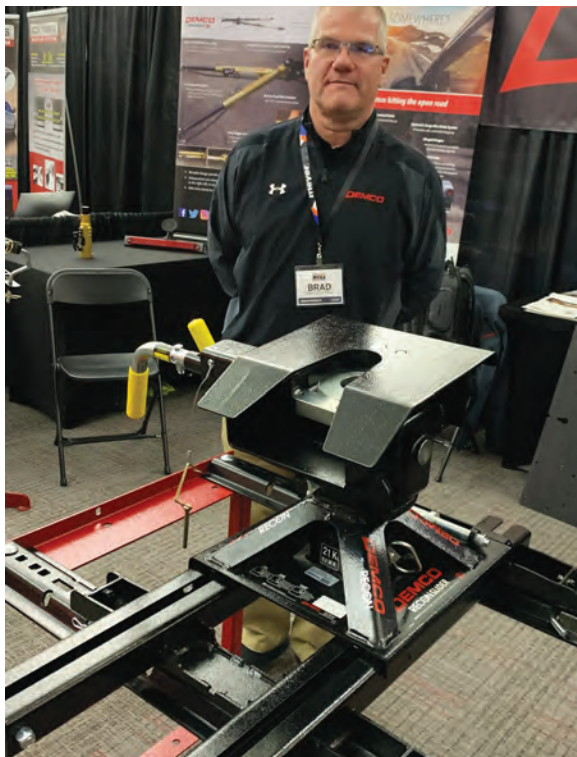
"What sets that manual slider apart is that it retracts and can move back 14 inches," Vander Pol says. "Versus, in the industry, we've seen 8 inches and 10 inches of movement to allow you to maneuver back and forth. We felt, since we had an auto-slide hitch that goes back 14 inches, that that would work well also with this, so that's what we did. Just a simple manual hitch rated at 21K. It's designed and we brought it into the marketplace to go into an industry-standard rail."

Simplicity of installation and use was on the engineers' minds when they were designing the hitch, according to Vander Pol.

"What's nice about it, too, is we developed it for the techs that are going to set the hitch up. There's not a lot of set up involved," he says. "It basically comes in on a pallet, for the dealer, and their set-up time – let's just

say if the customer has existing industry-standard rails on their truck, it's just a simple thing of replacing the existing hitch. They can take this hitch off of the pallet, drop it into the rails, put the handles on and their set up is complete. So, I guess that's another thing that really sets us apart as well."

**What impressed RV PRO:** Aside from its 21,000-pound towing capacity, the hitch offers three vertical height adjustments. Plus, its 14 inches of maneuverability will not go unnoticed by RVers attempting to get their rigs properly situated in tight spots. Also, Demco's famous "wrap-around jaw" with locking bar gives the driver added security. Finally, four pins are what holds the hitch to the truck, and its three-piece design makes it so one person could both put it on and remove it.



Demco Territory Manager Brad Vander Pol is pictured with the new Recon Slider Fifth Wheel Hitch at the Meyer MegaShow. He says dealers asked for Demco to develop the manual slider hitch.



# KING Extend Go Portable Cell Signal Booster

Every day, consumers are inundated with TV and social media ads touting the latest cellular service and the wide range of states those plans cover. For most users, cellular service is of little consequence, as almost all carriers have a strong signal in the major cities across the U.S.

For RVers and outdoor enthusiasts in general, however, cellular service is of far greater concern; the ability to make and receive phone calls becomes more important the farther they travel off the beaten path.

Cellular signal boosters have become a popular way to extend signal strength and cellular range for RVers, but many of these systems are designed for vehicle mount – meaning that once a consumer drives the tow vehicle or dinghy away from the campsite, they are again challenged by a weak or non-existent signal as they travel to local attractions.

The new KING Extend Go Portable Cell Signal Booster is designed to solve this problem, giving outdoor enthusiasts the freedom to travel to far away locales and still reach the outside world. “Our KX2000 KING Extend Pro Cell Booster was a huge hit with RVers when it launched, but we kept hearing from folks who wanted a kit that could also boost cell signal in their truck while pulling their trailers,” says Marc Lubker, director of aftermarket sales for KING. “We realized there was nothing like that on the market, so we got to work and came up with the Extend Go. It’s the first of its kind Portable Cell Signal Booster and hits a great price point.”



Marc Lubker, director of aftermarket sales for KING, is pictured with the new KING Extend Go Portable Cell Signal Booster at the Northern Wholesale show. Lubker is holding the Best New Product Runner-Up award the product won at the show, as voted on by RV dealers.

Lubker points out that the Extend Go’s appeal will go well beyond the RV market – making it a good fit for trucks, horse trailers, delivery vehicles, tiny houses and more.

“The Extend Go includes all of the components that come with the Extend Pro RV kit, plus a second set of antennas and a 12-volt adapter that allows the 50dB gain signal amplifier unit to be used on a car or truck,” Lubker says. “It also comes with an 8-foot tri-pod that allows for portable use. The whole kit comes packaged in a convenient hard side zippered carrying case.”

It also includes roof, pole and ladder brackets, as well as a 110-volt power supply.

Designed to boost both voice and data range, the Extend Go supports all U.S. cellular carriers, is 5G ready and is compatible with 4G/3G LTE voice and data as well. Another benefit of the product is that it can be used while parked or in motion, extending its capabilities.

**What impressed RV PRO:** Given how important connectivity is to RVers, even when camping in locations miles from civilization, the KING Extend Go Portable Cell Signal Booster definitely meets a need. The fact that the product supports all U.S. cellular carriers, is easy to transport and can be used while parked or in motion are definite pluses.

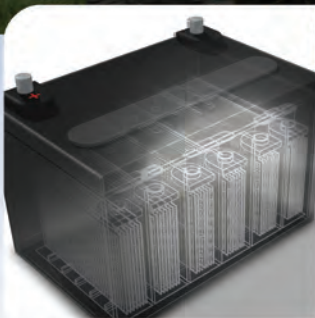


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# WFCO Auto-Detect Intelligent Battery Detection

The popularity of lithium-ion batteries in the RV world continues to grow, expanding along with the increased use of solar technology.

With that in mind, Elkhart, Ind.-based WFCO Electronics has developed a patent-pending product it calls Auto-Detect Intelligent Battery Detection, which is designed to recognize what type of battery is being used in a particular RV and change the charging profile based on the type of battery. Its use eliminates the need for an RV owner to use a completely separate converter, or to have to flip a switch manually, according to Todd Vice, aftermarket sales manager for WFCO.

"Currently in the world, there are standard converters out there, there's lithium converters and there's lithium switch converters," says Vice. "That's been the norm the last few years and what we've done with our new technology is called 'Auto-Detect.' Auto-Detect means that the converter will automatically detect the type of battery that's being used inside of a coach and it will charge it at the appropriate charge rate.



**Todd Vice, aftermarket sales manager for WFCO, is pictured at the Meyer MegaShow, where the company was promoting its Auto-Detect Intelligent Battery Detection product. Auto-Detect means that the converter will automatically detect the type of battery that's being used inside of a coach and it will charge it at the appropriate charge rate.**

"In a lithium battery you need to be able to get a 14.6 charge rhythm to go into that battery to maximize the potential of that battery – charge it to 100 percent, basically. You're going to spend thousands of dollars for these lithium batteries, so you want to maximize the potential of those batteries," he says. "That's where a lithium converter comes into play. Well, we've taken it a step further with it – versus having just straight lithium – Auto-Detect does both lead-acid, and again, lithium, whatever battery source they put in there Auto-Detect will determine what it is and charge it at the appropriate rate.

"The Auto-Detect is now going to become the norm within the OEMs that we do business with, and then in the aftermarket, it'll be the only product that will have availability to (all battery types)," Vice says. "The standard converter, the lithium and the lithium switch will all be going away. Auto-Detect will be available in the same models you're accustomed to getting, but it will only be Auto-Detect moving forward."

Vice says WFCO started shipping the product to OEMs a few months ago. It is slowly rolling the product out in the aftermarket through distributor channels.

With lithium-ion batteries growing rapidly as alternatives to lead-acid batteries for RVers, a device that can charge any type of battery – rather than a specific device to charge a specific type of battery – is attracting a lot of attention among OEMs, according to Vice.

"Because of Auto Detect, we've eliminated half our SKUs because of this," he adds.

Meanwhile, Vice says dealers also are responding favorably to the product because it works with multiple devices, meaning they don't have to stock products only designed to work with lead-acid batteries or only designed to work with lithium batteries.

"When we tell (dealers) we're going to cut their SKUs in half they get very excited," he says.

**What impressed RV PRO:** The phrase "disruptive technology" is one that is sometimes overused when talking about high-tech products, but in this case WFCO seems to have developed such a product with its Auto-Detect Intelligent Battery Detection product.



# Pinnacle Appliances' Outdoor Air Conditioner 2000

For RVers seeking the great outdoors, enjoying a meal at the picnic table happens at the weather's discretion. In Houston, home of Pinnacle Appliances, that often means battling hot and muggy days under the RV awning – a problem the supplier found a solution for.



**Pinnacle President Atul Vir is pictured in his booth at the Arrow show, with a washer-dryer combo the company is well-known for. The company's latest product offering is the Outdoor Air Conditioner 2000, which is designed to make hot days outdoors more bearable.**

The idea for an outdoor air conditioner came about in 2020, says Pinnacle President Atul Vir, as more people became interested in outdoor travel. An avid RVer himself, Vir says the product was inspired by campers needing to cool down in the Southern heat – no added water necessary.

"It's a spot air conditioner. It draws in the ambient air from outside and condenses it," Vir says. "It blows out hot air from the other side. Cold air comes out from the tube at the top and points to wherever you're sitting."

The freestanding unit cools outdoor spaces around 8 to 10 feet away, with a 7,000-BTU cooling capacity. It plugs into an RV's external outlet and has wheels to move around easily, weighing in around 60 pounds.

"It took about a year to develop and was launched over summer of 2021, and it's been selling," Vir says. "It takes some time for people to actually believe there's this product because there are some comparable products out there, like swamp coolers that you pour water into."

Pinnacle's 110-volt A/C condenses water from the air and stores it in a tank to prevent leaks, he says, which eventually needs to be emptied. However, for those wanting a more permanent set-up, the unit connects to

a drain hose that could be directed toward a flower bed.

"RVers are not moving around all the time – sometimes they are like snowbirds, and go park in one place for two months," Vir says. "The unit can be used for that setting as well."

Pinnacle's A/C also can be left outside, he says. The unit is "weatherized" for rain, sun and snow, with an operating temperature of 64.4 degrees F up to 113 degrees F.

Distributor shows have generated interest in Pinnacle's unit, and Vir says the company is already considering suggestions from dealers for improvement.

The first update – expected to be unveiled by next year – is a product with both an A/C and heater for year-round applications. The second improvement, Vir says, tailors to boondockers with a smaller 12-volt unit that has a handle for carrying.

The company's Outdoor Air Conditioner 2000 model is the second product in a lineup of new outdoor appliances, according to Vir. Along with the A/C, the company unveiled a one- and two-burner induction cooktop and plans to launch more outdoor offerings soon.

"Everybody wants to be outdoors, but then you face heat and mosquitos and all these things – how do we solve that?" Vir says.

**What impressed RV PRO:** Pinnacle's outdoor A/C is designed to bring relief to those who want to be outside during the heat of the day, which is a common occurrence. The fact that the A/C does not require added water and that it has weatherproof capabilities are nice bonus features.







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# Arrow Show Comes Up Aces



## Staff Reports

The distributor's first in-person show in two years was welcomed by exhibitors and dealer attendees, who gathered at the Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino in Las Vegas to network, learn about the latest products and stock up on inventory.

**LAS VEGAS** – While the COVID-19 pandemic has not totally receded, there was never any doubt by Arrow Distributing's executive team that the distributor would host an in-person event for its dealers this year.

"We were going to have a show. It's not just about business – it's about enjoying what you do," said Andy Mullin, co-vice president of Arrow Distributing. "For a lot of people, this is a big part of their enjoyment. It's getting around all of your peers once a year that hasn't happened in the last couple of years."

"It's good for building relationships and keeping the relationships we have with people in the industry strong, too," added Andrea Mullin, Arrow co-vice president with her husband, Andy Mullin.

The annual Arrow Distributing show took place Jan. 11-12 at the Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino. This was the first time in two years that Arrow Distributing hosted a live show; last year's event went virtual as a result of COVID-19. This year's two-day event offered dealers education and the opportunity to order aftermarket parts and accessories from 70-plus vendors in attendance.

"I feel like the whole vibe this year has been extremely positive. Everybody is just happy to be out. I think they're at the point of like: 'We're just going to live our lives. I just want to get back to normal and it just feels normal again,'" said Andrea Mullin.

"We have gotten a lot of feedback from the dealers just coming up and thanking us for having a show," Andy Mullin said.

"That's notable because it tells you where our industry is with shows," he added. "At least from our dealer base, they were ready to get out. Actually, both vendors and dealers. We had vendors come up and thank us for having a show."

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**Dealers crowd around the Arterra Distribution booth at the Arrow show to talk with Managing Director Bobby Raatz during Arterra's Poker Run hour. Poker Runs feature special show pricing. Dealers collect giant cards during each Poker Run and the dealer with the best hand at the end of the show wins a prize.**



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PHOTOS BY RV PRO STAFF





**Nigel Milbank of Milenco is pictured in front of his towing mirror display. New from Milenco is what Milbank describes as the largest surface-area towing mirror on the market.**

Prior to the show, expected attendance numbers fluctuated a bit, in part due to the surge in the Omicron variant or last-minute issues due to flight cancellations.

“Because the registration started out so high, we still had good attendance. Under the circumstances, it was much higher than expected,” Andy Mullin said.

For those who dealers unable to come in person, Arrow provided a virtual format for dealers to be place orders via the Tradewise software system, which Arrow made use of in 2021.

“It’s extremely efficient,” Andy Mullin said of Tradewise. “There was little to no commitment or obligation on the vendor side. We just took vendor show pricing and put it into a virtual format.”

### New Vendors, New Product Debuts at Arrow

The Arrow Distributing show welcomed a number of new exhibitors at this year’s event, including CURT, a supplier of towing products that was acquired by Lippert in 2019.

“CURT is a major hitch line, and it went over very well. That was a big seller for us at the show. It’s not a new product line, but it is for Arrow,” said Andy Mullin.

The Mullins also noted that first-time vendor Kuma Outdoors was popular for its camping products, including the Backtrack chairs.

Additionally, the RV Women’s Alliance had a booth at the show. “We felt it was important to have them represented here at our show,” Andrea Mullin said.

“Thanks to Arrow Distributing welcoming the RV Women’s Alliance to be a guest at their show, we were able to recruit more people to our organization. I think being able to network again is a positive turn of events for our organization and the industry,” RVWA President Susan Carpenter said.

“It was great to be face-to-face to discuss what our organization is about and what we are up to in 2022. The show was a great way to start out the new year,” she said.

Meanwhile, Flow-jet and Acuva also attended Arrow for the first time.

As far as new products, several companies brought new technology to the show. Pace brought its new TravelFi Journey1 product that allows users to stream and pay as they go. KING exhibited its Wi-Fi signal extender, which drew a lot of interest.



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**Chris Carpenter (right) of Creative Products Group discusses CPG's key and lock program with dealers.**



**Jeff Hostetler of Tom Manning & Associates (right) discusses orders with a dealer on the second day of the show.**



**Some 24 Arrow staff members put on a successful show. It was the first time the show was live and in person since 2020.**



**Dometic was the VIP Sponsor of the 2022 Arrow show. Pictured from left to right are: Scott Laidlaw, John Kendall and Jeff Johns.**

Both Andy and Andrea Mullin noted Pinnacle's plethora of products.

"Pinnacle has some colorful new combo units. They also have really cool accessories that they're selling, like the single bottle wine chiller and their portable outdoor air conditioner," the Mullins said.

#### **Dealer Education is a Big Focus**

The first day of the show focused on product education. Progress Manufacturing kicked off its seminar in game-show style, challenging dealers to pick topics from a Jeopardy!-style question board. Attendees had to answer questions about Equal-i-zer hitch products and facts about the company's history and recent acquisition by DexKo Global.

Hughes Autoformers packed a tight room with 80-plus dealers in attendance as did connectivity supplier KING.

"Arrow Distributing continues to offer a great show experi-



*“We had vendors come up and thank us for having a show.”*

**– Andy Mullin, co-vice president of Arrow Distributing**

ence. From the vendor training to the atmosphere on the show floor, to their great buying opportunities – especially on their ‘Poker Run’ Deals. They are a great partner for us and are always willing to go the extra mile to help whenever possible,” said Jim Menosky, parts manager for Mike Thompson’s RV Superstores.

Even before the official educational seminars, Arrow salespeople received training on new products from vendors.

Andrea Mullin explained, “We have a training pre-show just for our salespeople. We had about four or five vendors/rep groups who came in to do what we call preshow training, so that our salespeople know the newest products coming to market.”

### **The Future is Bright**

Dealers and suppliers in attendance at the Arrow show seemed bullish on the aftermarket for the next few years. Given that the RV industry produced more than 600,000 units in 2021, the thought is that consumers will continue to accessorize their units or need replacements parts in a few years.

“The dealers I spoke with say it’s positive. The only concern is having product and the logistics. Making sure they have inventory that they can get at the best price possible to service their customers. That’s the big one. But the outlook is all good,” said Andy Mullin.


Supply chain issues made a lot of headlines in 2021 – and not just in the RV industry. When asked what 2022 looks like, the Mullins said that while supply chain issues are still a bit of a problem, the outlook is brighter.

Andy Mullin said, “I talked to one West Coast dealer. He said it’s a mess and it’s not getting any better from the port standpoint. The container issues are not getting any better. When they empty a container, they can’t bring the container back to the port because they’re loaded with full containers.”

“But our inventory levels are getting a lot better,” Andrea Mullin said. “We were waiting six to nine months on product. So now we’re going to be able to deliver a lot of this product after the show.”

“Communication is key. Some vendors are very good about communicating lead times. They’ve been forthcoming about that because they know more than they did before,” she added.

By all accounts, dealers, suppliers, and Arrow employees were happy to be back together to experience a positive show face to face.

“We did it because we have to get back to interacting like humans,” said Andy Mullin. “It’s important to us to keep this going because the relationship is huge for us. Our relationship with our dealers is key, so we were going to have this show regardless. People were ready to get out.” 



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# Meyer MegaShow Returns



By Tony Kindelspire

The distributor's second in-person show added exhibitors and attracted attendees from several prominent dealership groups.



Alex Walker, director of sales at Blue Ox, stands ready to speak with dealers at the supplier's booth. Blue Ox was one of the sponsors of the Meyer MegaShow.

**FRENCH LICK, Ind.** – Meyer Distributing hosted a successful second in-person show in January at the historic French Lick Springs Hotel, which has hosted multiple presidents, movie stars and musical icons over its 100-year history.

It was supposed to be the distributor's third annual MegaShow, but COVID-19 caused the cancellation of 2021's in-person event.

"This is our second physical show," said Seth Trueblood, assistant manager for Meyer Distributing. "Prior to that, we did smaller group things at Meyer headquarters. We're just down the road in Jasper."

Meyer Distributing has about 12 warehouses spread across the country and employs more than 1,200 people, Trueblood said. By far the largest portion of those employees – more than 300 – work at its home facility.

The company got its start in the automotive parts and accessories business. It branched out into the RV market about six years ago, and Trueblood said that part of the business has grown rapidly, making an annual trade show focusing on RV parts and accessories a necessity.

This year's show drew close to 100 vendors and representatives from more than 100 dealerships, according to Trueblood.

"We had over 300 people respond, representing 100 to 125 dealerships," he said. "They represent everybody from PRVN (Priority RV Network), Route 66, RV Retailer and Campers Inn. So, a lot of the top dealers. We're pretty happy about that."

At the show, vendors gave away thousands of dollars in prizes. A \$15,000 cash drawing at the show-closing dinner only added to the excitement of returning to an in-person show.

"The reception I've seen is people are excited to be here, face-to-face," Trueblood said. "And they're ready to buy."



Kyler Morrison (left), national sales manager for Torklift, and Todd Vice, aftermarket sales manager for WFCO, are pictured in their respective booths, which were located side-by-side at the Meyer show.

PHOTOS BY TONY KINDELSPIRE





### Exhibitors Pleased with Dealer Traffic

John Primm, the director of distribution at Dometic, was pleased with the number of dealers stopping by the company's booth to check out its redesigned water heater and a new refrigerator, among other products.

"We're pleasantly surprised by the traffic," he said. "The industry is still abuzz, and we can tell that from the traffic we're seeing from dealers here today. We're just getting into the season and things are just insanely busy. By all indications, they are going to continue to be just as crazy."

Primm said that, as far as product demand, air conditioners were what dealers were asking about the most, followed by the company's various sanitation products.

Kyler Morrison, national sales manager for Torklift, was also happy with the number of dealers stopping by his company's booth.

"It's nice to see friendly faces again," said Morrison, who described exhibitor traffic at his booth as brisk. Some dealers were ones he's done business with for years, while a few were new to him.

"It's a mixture," he said. "A lot of people want to see what's new. There's a lot of rekindling relationships with people we haven't seen in a while."

The main thing people want to ask him about? "Supply chain issues," Morrison said, adding that his company has managed to maintain good lead times all through the past year. He encouraged dealers to look out for new products Torklift will be introducing later this year.

Todd Vice, aftermarket sales manager for WFCO, was attending his first Meyer show, having traveled to the Hoosier state from Wilmington, N.C.

"We like to be in person," Vice said. "You can't replicate in person with online (communication) or in a chat room."

Among all the products in its booth, the one WFCO was most proud of was its newest, Vice said: the Auto-Detect battery charger that has been in development since pre-COVID days.

**The historic and ornate French Lick Resort in French Lick, Ind., played host to the Meyer MegaShow for the second time, in part because of its proximity to the Meyer's headquarters in nearby Jasper, Ind. The resort has hosted U.S. presidents, famous musicians and more in its long history.**

*"People are excited to be here, face-to-face. And they're ready to buy."*

**- Seth Trueblood, assistant manager for Meyer Distributing**

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**show 2022**

**TO OUR VENDORS & DEALERS**

**THANK YOU!**

We battled through a tough environment but still prospered with great support from our vendors and dealers. Any dealer that was unable to attend this year's show or any prior event, always has an open invitation to visit our headquarters. Stay tuned for our 2023 MEGA Show Plans!







Vendors at the Meyer show said they appreciated the chance to meet one-on-one with dealers in a relaxed setting, like the one taking place here at the Covercraft booth.

### Nothing Like Face to Face

Mike Higginbotham, the owner of Mike's Trailer Hitches & Accessories in Georgia, drove 7½ hours from the Peach State to attend the Meyer show

While his business is not an RV dealership, "We do an awful lot of tow bars," he said. "And hitches."

"I think they're very important," Higginbotham said of in-person shows, which he, too, missed attending in the past year. "I've been going to them for years; I've been all over the country."

He's attended many NTP-STAG shows, he said, although he did not expect to get to that one this year. But he was able to turn the Meyer show into a mini-vacation for him and his wife, and as a Meyer customer he was happy to meet face-to-face with some folks he had only met previously over the phone.

"It's just fun to meet the manufacturers," Higginbotham said. "Some of them I've known for years, some you talk to on the phone a lot."

Another perk of going to shows? Seeing products that he didn't know he would need or want, but recognizing when something will benefit his business. "I always tried to be open-minded about things," he said. "I did buy two items that I wouldn't ordinarily have bought."

Dealers ask questions of a PullRite rep about one of the company's fifth wheel hitches.



Dealers gather around the Gen-Y Hitch exhibit to learn more about the Nappanee, Ind.-based company's towing products.



Seth Trueblood, the assistant manager at Meyer, said more than 100 dealerships sent representatives to French Lick, Ind., to participate in the distributor show, including some of the largest dealer groups in the country.





John Primm, (right), director of distribution at Dometic, is pictured with his colleague, Mike Short, at the company's exhibit. The company's air conditioners and sanitation products attracted strong dealer interest, according to Primm.

Jory Heveline, owner of Rivertown RV, was attending his first RV distributor show. He retired as a financial adviser after 15 years and, after taking a year off, realized, "I don't sit very well." Circumstances led to him buying a piece of a friend's camper repair business and he started fixing RVs and camper trailers, turning a longtime hobby into a business.

Rivertown doesn't do any RV sales – just repair and installations – but it has grown a lot in the past three years, Heveline said. Lagrange, Ky., where the business is located, just happens to be in a spot – it's not far from Louisville – where there aren't a lot of options for RVers to take their rigs to get repaired or to purchase a desired upgrade. The dealers that are in the area are slammed and some will send him business, Heveline says. His business now draws customers from hundreds of miles away.

As for the Meyer show, he was buying "a bunch of stuff" and, even better, he spoke with Meyer's Cody Ziegler, director of sales, who offered to come and visit and help organize the layout of his shop.

Designing a showroom layout for his shop is something he's had to teach himself, Heveline said, and he added he will greatly appreciate the professional expertise.

Besides, his days are full enough as it is trying to keep customers happy.

"There's 10 units that are in the shop right now, and only two of them have been there more than a month – and that's only because I couldn't get the part," Heveline said. "The other eight – it's just like a revolving door." **RV**

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SPECIAL PRODUCT FOCUS:

# Fresh Water and Sanitation

While many factors can impact the RVing experience, one crucial element is ensuring an RV has fresh water and sanitary conditions. Whether it's a water filtration system, holding tank treatments, or leak-free sewer connection kits, the products featured here are all designed to maintain a clean and comfortable environment for life on the road.

For more information on any of the products in this section, type the website address that appears below a respective product listing into your website browser. Viewers of the magazine's digital edition can click their mouse on any listing to be taken directly to the respective company's website.



## HOLDING TANK FOR JAYCO APPLICATIONS

**ICON Technologies**, Winkler, Manitoba, Canada, offers its Holding Tank H3859 – a 37-gallon tank with specifically placed fittings corresponding to certain Jayco applications. Configuration A – 1-1/2" Drain Reducer, installed at the drain location and four level sensors installed. Configuration B – Part number O174O26 (original OEM). Roto-molded, one-piece construction with spin welded components. Certified to IAPMO standards.

[www.icondirect.com](http://www.icondirect.com)



## WASTE-HOLDING TOTE

**Thetford**, Ann Arbor, Mich., presents its Titan Tote, which it describes as the most functional on the market with industry-leading simple and durable features. Features include a low fill height of 6", which cooperates with even the lowest RV waste valves; multiple handles for easy lifting and storing; and fast clean use with the attached Titan Sewer Hose and corner drain outlet. The Titan Tote product line includes both four-wheel and two-wheel models in 21, 27 and 35 gallons.

[www.thetford.com](http://www.thetford.com)



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## WATER PURIFIER

**Acuva**, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, offers its ArrowMax 2.0 Water Purifier, an advanced water purification system specifically suited to RVs. The ArrowMax 2.0 kills up to 99.9999 percent of bacteria and viruses in water, as well as eliminating lead, chlorine, fluoride, and other harmful contaminants. The system is low power, long life and easy to install. A typical Acuva system will save more than 100,000 single-use water bottles over its lifetime, making it great for the environment, too.

[www.acuvatech.com](http://www.acuvatech.com)



## WHISPER-QUIET TOILET

**Dometic**, Elkhart, Ind., offers its Dometic 310 Toilet. Designed with RVers' comfort and convenience in mind, the Dometic 310 toilet helps make them feel like they never left home, with features such as Whisper-quiet operation. The 310 is the only RV toilet that comes standard with a slow-close lid. No more waking up the family with a slamming seat in the middle of the night. Also, ease of use – the 310 features a right-sided flush pedal to make it easy to use; simply press to activate the flush.

[www.dometic.com](http://www.dometic.com)



## HYDRONIC HEATING SOLUTION

**Aqua-Hot**, Frederick, Colo., an **Airxcel** brand, presents the 125 Hydronic Heating Solution. The 125 is a thermal fluid heat and hot water on-demand unit designed specifically for campervans with both gasoline and diesel models. The innovation of the 125 lies in its compact, all-in-one design that produces moist, even interior heat and continuous hot water at 110° to 120°F at 0.8 gpm from a single unit. A complete high-end climate system for kitchen and shower applications in Class B vehicles.

[www.aquahot.com](http://www.aquahot.com)



## FRESHWATER RECLAMATION SYSTEM

**Aqua View**, Temecula, Calif., offers its Showermi\$er, a freshwater reclamation system for RVs. Unlike water flow restriction devices, Aqua View's patented Showermi\$er recirculates unused fresh water before it ever goes down the drain, saving money and extending fresh and gray water tank capacities up to 40 percent without changing tanks or adding weight. Imagine no more wasted water – and money – down the drain. Now being factory-installed by North America's leading RV manufacturers. Also available for retrofitting existing RVs.

[www.aquaviewinc.com](http://www.aquaviewinc.com)



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- 28012 - Double
- 28014 - Single X-tended
- 28024 - Double X-tended



[www.balrvproducts.com](http://www.balrvproducts.com)



## RV WATER PUMP

Remco Industries, Osakis, Minn., presents its Remco Aquajet. With years of field proven reliability, patented variable speed technology and five chamber design, the PowerRV Aquajet Series has earned the reputation as the most advanced RV water system pump on the market. Unmatched performance makes it the first choice for leading RV manufacturers.

[www.remcoindustries.com/](http://www.remcoindustries.com/)



## RV HOLDING TANK TREATMENT

Bio-Kleen Products, Kalamazoo, Mich., presents its Kleen Waste dual-action RV holding tank treatment with an enzyme and quaternary. Deodorizes, cleans lines and lubricates valves. Breaks down waste and regular tissue for RVs, boats and portable restrooms. Reduces odor/gases in gray water tanks with a Wild Michigan Cherry scent. Safe for septic systems and dumping stations. Formaldehyde-free.

[www.biokleen.com](http://www.biokleen.com)



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## CAMPGROUND-FRIENDLY HOLDING TANK TREATMENTS

**Star brite**, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., presents an entire line of holding tank treatments. For more than 47 years, Star brite has created premium chemicals that can withstand the harsh environment of the open seas, and now uses that expertise to create a line of holding tank treatments that can handle the demanding rigors of the open road. With three technologies available – chemical, bioactivated, or nitrate – these treatments keep any holding tank smelling and working its best.

[www.starbrite.com/rv](http://www.starbrite.com/rv)



## WASTE VALVE ATTACHMENT

**Valterra Products**, Mission Hills, Calif., presents its Twist-On Waste Valve, which allows RVers to fix to their RV the easy way. This valve twists directly onto an RVer's current waste valve, eliminating expensive service work. Simply attach to the front of the broken valve, open the handle or paddle of the broken valve, and users are good to go. With a bayonet attachment system, RVers can be sure that the valve stays on tight. Easy to use, the Valterra Twist-On Waste Valve is well-suited for any RV, camper, or trailer owner.

[www.valterra.com/](http://www.valterra.com/)



## HOSE/CORD CADDY

**Stromberg Carlson**, Traverse City, Mich., presents its Hose/Cord Caddy. The Stromberg Carlson HC-75 hose/cord caddy holds up to 75' of water hose or 50' of 30-amp cord. Each hose end unwinds while the bulk of the hose remains neat and tidy in the caddy. It conveniently stores hose accessories. The hose caddy is stackable and measures 17" wide and 6.5" tall. Made in the U.S.A.

[www.StrombergCarlson.com](http://www.StrombergCarlson.com)



## TOUCHLESS FAUCET

**Empire Faucets**, Cleveland, Ohio, presents its SLT4900TLN-A – a single-handle, touchless faucet constructed of stainless steel with a maintenance-free diamond ceramic disc cartridge. Motion sensor located on faucet head activates a stream of water. Designed for one-hole or three-hole installation.

<http://empfaucets.com>



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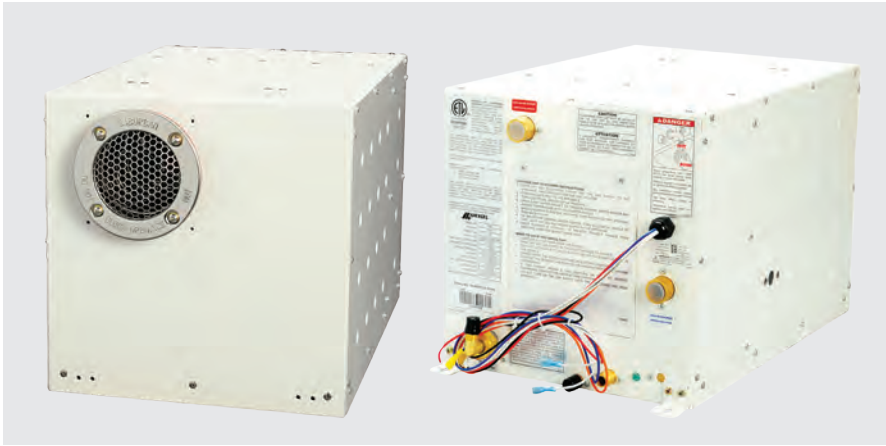


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### CONTINUOUS WATER HEATER

**Suburban**, Dayton, Tenn., an **Airxcel** brand, offers its Advantage Tankless Continuous Water Heater. The water heater uses an exclusive 60,000-BTU two-stage modulating combustion system to instantaneously adjust the LP gas input, to provide consistent heat and precise temperature control from 95 to 130°F. Advantage Tankless Water Heaters are lighter than traditional models at a mere 36 pounds, with two freeze protection mechanisms and state-of-the-art, three-try direct spark ignition for safe and reliable performance.

[www.suburbanrv.com](http://www.suburbanrv.com)



### CORNER LAVY SINK

**Specialty Recreation**, El Cajon, Calif., offers its Lavy Corner Sink – a smart and compact solution for any wet bath/shower renovation. Made of ABS plastic, it is strong and lightweight. It includes all hardware needed for installation. Easy to install. An optional sink skirt is included. Standard 1-1/2" lavy drain.

[www.specrec.com](http://www.specrec.com)



### WATER DEIONIZER

**On The Go Portable Water Softener**, Bloomington, Ind., presents its Mixed Bed Double DI & Bypass. The water deionizer uses ion exchange technology to remove all solids from the water source, resulting in a mineral-free water that leaves no spotting after rinsing. It produces around 450 gallons at 250 PPM. The approximate number of rinses before refilling, assuming TDS of 250 PPM, 2 GPM, using 5 gallons per car and 30 gallons per RV = (Car – 90 RV, Class A – 15). The unit contains 1/2 cubic feet of mixed bed resin.

[www.portablewaterdi.com](http://www.portablewaterdi.com)



### AUTOMATIC SEWER DOCKING SYSTEM

**Calvin Development**, Highland Village, Texas, offers its Autodocked patented automatic sewer docking system for RVs. With the touch of a button, Autodocked connects an RV sewer hose with the dump station, automatically dumps the black water tank and the gray water tank, and then automatically stores the hose safely under the RV. Autodocked has made the RV sewer dumping process touchless.

[www.autodocked.com](http://www.autodocked.com)



### WHEELED TOTE TANK

**Camco Manufacturing**, Greensboro, N.C., offers its Rhino Tote Tank with Steerable Wheels. The 36-gallon Rhino Tote Tank is a ready-to-use kit that includes everything needed to transport waste from an RV to a dump station when the RV is parked too far away for a sewer hose. The tote tank features two steerable, 6" no-flat front wheels that provide easy maneuverability, help distribute weight evenly and no longer require lifting to tow. The tow bar allows users to easily roll the tote tank as they would a cart.

[www.camco.net](http://www.camco.net)



### ON-DEMAND TANKLESS WATER HEATER

**Girard Group**, San Clemente, Calif., offers the GSWH-2. It features an on-board micro-processor that monitors the incoming water flow and temperature and the outlet temperature. The new digital display allows for adjustable temperature settings, operating modes, and visual diagnostics. The quiet, brushless 12V motor and 42,000 BTUs provides the optimum performance for an RV plumbing system that will provide and maintain the desired hot water temperature in any environment without the need for special LP gas lines or special plumbing.

[www.greenrvproducts.com](http://www.greenrvproducts.com)



### DISINFECTANT/INSECTICIDE

**Noble Pine Products**, Yonkers, N.Y., offers its Sterifab disinfectant/insecticide that not only kills viruses, bacteria, mold, mildew and fungus, but also kills all stages of bedbugs, fleas, ticks, mites, mosquitoes and a host of other insects. Sterifab is a ready-to-use product that dries very quickly and can be applied to most surfaces. It is also registered with the U.S. EPA.

[www.sterifab.com](http://www.sterifab.com)





### DRAIN SYSTEM

**Lippert**, Elkhart, Ind., offers its Floë Drain-Down System. Every RV owner knows flushing a rig's water lines can be time-consuming and expensive. With Floë, users can clear their lines the moment they want to, at home or on the road. Using compressed air pressure, Floë can drain a freshwater system in minutes – leaving users with water that's ready for family, friends, and pets to use. And it can help users prep their RV for winter, so frost damage doesn't impact their water lines or tank.

<http://lippert.com>



### RV WATER FILTER

**Clearsource**, Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif., offers its Clearsource Ultra. The new, reengineered, top-of-the-line Ultra systems feature Clearsource-exclusive VirusGuard filters that use NASA-developed technology to remove or reduce not just bacteria and cysts, but viruses.

[www.clearsourcerv.com](http://www.clearsourcerv.com)



### GIANT TOTE TANK

**Barker Mfg.**, Battle Creek, Mich., makes the 42-gallon Super Tote Tank with premium four-wheel pneumatic tires with zerk grease fittings and bearing hubs. No lifting is required to move or empty, just attach a 3" by 5' sewer hose to the RV waste valve and open. Constructed of heavy-duty polyethylene, dual front wheels swivel on a large steel bracket, safely haul with a steel tow bar. All accessories are provided: sewer hose, caps, bayonet adapters, rinse-out hose, and full-tank indicator. The tank is made in the U.S.A.

[www.barkermfg.com](http://www.barkermfg.com)

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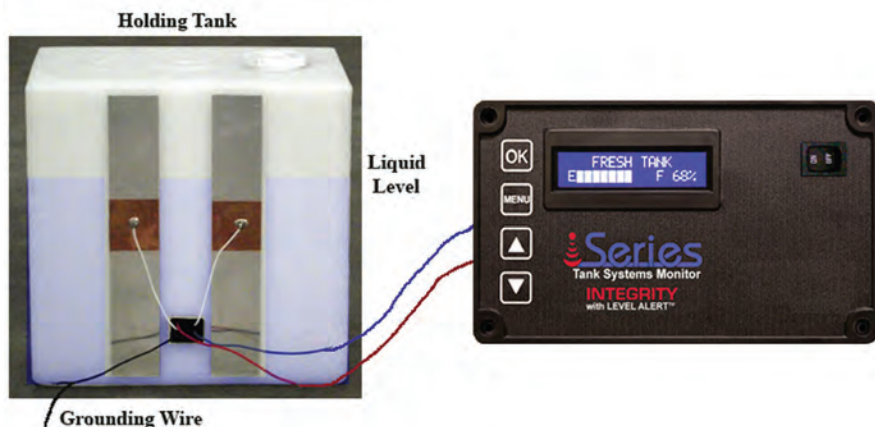
[www.durafaucet.com](http://www.durafaucet.com)



### QUICK-CONNECT SEWER KIT

**Prest-O-Fit Mfg.**, Chandler, Ariz., offers its Blueline Ultimate Sewer Kit. The kit contains everything needed for a simple, secure hookup up to 20'. The universal elbow securely fits most park sewer openings. The included hose adapter has four bayonet hooks and an “X-ring” seal for a leak-free connection to most waste-valve outlets. Ultimate Sewer Hoses have pushover quick-connectors installed for simple, “push-on” connections without the need for clamps. Sewer Seals create a secure, airtight seal with hoses and fittings, eliminating unwanted odor and drainage.

[www.prestofit.com](http://www.prestofit.com)



### HOLDING TANK MONITORING SYSTEM

**Tech Edge Manufacturing**, Sweet Home, Ore., presents the iSeries Tank Monitoring System. The iSeries is patented technology with Level Alert using external sensors that read the entire height of the tank, giving users a readout in percentages instead of 1/4 or 1/3 tank increments. It will monitor the tanks and warn users when they go out of the bounds set. It is capable of monitoring up to six regular tanks and two resistive sensors for LP or fuel.

[www.tankedge.com](http://www.tankedge.com)



### RV & MARINE HOSES

**Teknor Apex**, Pawtucket, R.I., presents the Zero-G Hose. Teknor Apex makes Zero-G RV/ marine hoses that weigh up to 40 percent less than vinyl hoses. The hose features a pliable True-Flex core that minimizes kinks and remains flexible down to 35 degrees F. The maneuverability and lightweight features allow for easy coiling and compact storage. The G-Force high-density jacket is leak, abrasion and puncture-resistant. This hose is lead-safe, drinking-water safe and is equipped with crush-resistant couplings.

[www.apexhose.com](http://www.apexhose.com)





### ENZYME-BASED HOLDING TANK SOLUTION

Walex Products Co., Wilmington, N.C., introduces the Bio-Pak. Bio-Pak offers a biocide-free, formaldehyde-free, septic system safe, and California-compliant black holding tank solution. The Walex R&D team has extensively tested Bio-Pak's natural enzyme-based formula to ensure it rapidly digests waste and paper, helps clean tanks and sensors, and is best-in-class odor control.

[www.walex.com](http://www.walex.com)



### TANK CLEANER

Unique Camping + Marine, Arvada, Colo., presents its Unique Tank Cleaner to unclog black tanks, normally in 12 to 72 hours. No driving necessary. Powered by the most advanced bio-enzymatic blend available. Contains higher concentrations of activated cleaners than all leading tank cleaners. Clears all types of clogs including pyramid plugs, compacted waste inside black tanks and blocked plumbing lines. Breaks down solid waste including toilet paper, poop and residual sludge - no matter how old it is. Satisfaction guaranteed. Solves old and new problems.

[www.uniquecampingmarine.com](http://www.uniquecampingmarine.com)



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PrecisionTemp, Cincinnati, Ohio, offers the 550-EC and 550-NSP-EC instantaneous hot water heaters for highly efficient endless flows of hot water. The 550-EC replaces standard RV water heaters while the 550-NSP-EC vents through the floor - it requires no side-wall penetration. These American-made products are easy to service and winterize and require no decalcification or special maintenance. Both come standard with cold weather and wind protection, backed by over 25 years of superior service and a no-nonsense two-year warranty.

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## DEALER TRENDS:

# Canadian Dealers Evaluate 2022 Market Conditions

By Marney Carmichael

Recently, *RV PRO* spoke with Canadian RV dealers about sales, supplies and ongoing issues due to the COVID-19 pandemic, plus overall market conditions in their area and across the country. Here's what they told us.

**Sam Bruni, general manager  
Christie's RV  
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario**

"Every dealer is different, every dealer is dealing with different manufacturers, and every manufacturer is dealing with challenges and supply chain issues. This week it's one thing – the next week it could be another. Nobody really knows too much in advance what the next problem might be.

"For us, we're at a similar level to where we were last year. We pre-sell a lot of our units before they get here. Most manufacturers that we deal with have pared down models that they offer. We are an exclusive dealer, so I firmly believe that our relationship with the manufacturer that we support is certainly helping us. Looking ahead, we'll be in good shape if the manufacturer can supply us with what we sell.

"The manufacturer can't commit to everything though, as they are at the mercy of shortages as well. Like everything now, sometimes it takes a little longer to get what you'd like, but customers have been relatively understanding.



"We're encouraging customers to act on ordering it today – don't wait for March or April because we don't know what may change. Normally, there would be over 100 trailers on our lot, but it's been about three years since we've had this.

"Customers realize there is a shortage and it's more about, 'If it fits my needs, I am going to buy it.'

"Starting tomorrow [mid-January], any trucker not double vaccinated will be turned away at the (U.S.-Canada) border. We are unique in that our city is on the border. Worst-case scenario, I can go across the border and pick up a unit, but not all dealers can do this. This (government) decision is going to affect all industries, just as COVID has affected all industries.

"Nevertheless, I am still very optimistic that the RV business is going to continue to explode. The RV business is very resilient. We're still selling trailers and people are finding different ways to use them – even if the parks are full, whether it be the backyard or a friend's property. And these people aren't just going to sell their RVs – they will keep on exploring and traveling.

"The RV business has many good years ahead. This pandemic has introduced camping and RVing to many people of all ages. Let's face it: We have to do something with our time. People are trying to support the mandates of masks and adhering to the restrictions, but everyone is looking forward to a more normal time. We don't really talk about COVID anymore with our customers, we just get on with it."



**Chardell Brydon, business manager  
Jerry's RV Trailer Sales & Service  
New Minas, Nova Scotia**

“Our RV inventory levels are still very low. My dealership is relatively small compared to many, but I have about 20 percent of the units that I would typically have on-hand. I have been buying used units privately to keep the lot from looking completely empty.

“It has been a frustrating experience being able to get trailers. In a normal environment, you can choose what floorplans you want to have, and you know roughly when you may get them. Right now, that seems to be dictated for you – it’s like an RV inventory lottery. You have orders in for practically everything in the hopes that it will get you what you want, but you are at the mercy of the luck of the draw. Then there is the price. It’s hard to pre-sell when you don’t know how much they will cost once you get them.

“In some cases, parts have taken quite a bit of time to receive. If you need something very specific, it could be a waiting game. Our parts people have had to be very resourceful seeking out alternative solutions. You really need to think outside of the box.

“The biggest concern we have had during COVID has been finding people who want to work. We have positions that we hope to fill again this year as we near spring. We have a solid core of staff, but the last couple of years it was very challenging being able to find suitable people to fill the additional personnel needs that we had. It came down to less inventory to handle, so we just widened our workloads to work together to get the units out the door.

“I think this coming year could be even more challenging with hiring employees. It seems as though every sector of business in our area is advertising that they have positions available. Time will tell.

“I try to think positively, but I am a bit concerned for the upcoming selling season. Although the RV market is strong, I am not beginning the season with the amount of inventory that I had in the past two years. New trailers are arriving, but at a very slow rate, and with the price increases that have taken place – being anywhere from 30 to 50 percent – I’m not sure how this will impact our customer’s willingness to invest in a new one this year.

“I think every spring brings a new group of purchasers, so we just need to keep positive and not be directing attention to how the environment has changed and market a little differently. Adapting in this business is so important.”

**Al Robinson, dealer principal/president  
Great Canadian RV  
Peterborough, Ontario**

“For most dealers in Ontario, inventory remains low, and this is said to be for numerous reasons: manufacturers can’t build enough fast enough; manufacturers’ allocation process have a flawed criteria in terms of how many units a dealer receives and who gets them; and as people are purchasing trailers by ordering so quickly that trailers are sold before they reach the dealers, the dealers can’t build inventory.

“Warranty parts are taking months to receive, as manufacturers want to continue to build trailers and pulling parts away from production will slow down the process. Manufacturers also have the same difficulty as dealers in that they can’t get the parts they need to build or cover warranty issues fast enough.

“In-store parts and accessories have been difficult to stock, but it does seem to be relaxing a bit. There was a propane regulator shortage across the industry from manufacturing to retail and service stores last year, but we finally received our shipment in December. It truly depends on the part and where and how it’s made. All production is having supply chain issues in every industry, and I don’t believe this will improve until late 2022.

“In Ontario, our industry is deemed to be essential, so there is no loss of employment. Nevertheless, there have been some staffing issues as team members have opted to stay home as opposed to working for fear of potentially being exposed to COVID-19. Further to that, seasonal jobs or minimum-wage paying jobs have been next to impossible to fill, as it seems some are staying home and collecting pandemic benefits offered by the government as opposed to working.

“We all have COVID protocols to adhere to and every dealership is doing things slightly different from the next. The important thing is the safety of your staff and the customers.

“2022 is starting off equally as strong as 2021, which was a record year. If the manufacturers can continue to supply us with the same level of trailers as they did in 2021, dealers should have another strong year, as demand remains high.

“People still want and need to get away and an RV is simply the best way to do this during this pandemic. They can be on





*"To get a part might mean that we're using a donor item off a different RV that is already unsellable because it's also waiting on a part. This would have been unheard of before but is becoming increasingly common."*

**—Brent Fullerton,  
general manager Carefree RV**

vacation and see the country but still isolate with their family. In Ontario, the provincial government has just announced a \$1,000 tax credit for 'staycations' in 2022, which is huge in our industry.

"Consumer sentiment remains high. Most people arrive at the dealership after doing their online homework, knowing what they are looking for and what they are willing to pay. People are also anxious to purchase, as they don't want to miss out on the opportunity to purchase and camp in 2022, as many missed the chance last year. They understand the changing environment and tend to be more willing to order a unit they haven't seen, as long as they believe they will get it in 2022. It's a changing time.

"Canadian dealers follow the same indicators as the U.S. dealers, but I think we're less dependent on these indicators and look at market conditions differently and more cautiously. Sometimes, it's more what your gut tells you.

"What is happening in Alberta is different than Ontario, which is different than the East Coast, so market conditions can vary by region, where I believe American dealers assess their analytics looking at their country as whole."

### **Brent Fullerton, general manager Carefree RV Edmonton and Leduc, Alberta**

"In Canada, for parts and inventory, we rely on a few large suppliers and distributors to get everything to us. Depending on the item, it's a roll of the dice as to whether there are 30 in stock and you can have it overnight or, in some scenarios, we're on month 18 and still waiting for parts.

"We still face lots of challenges getting products into the country due to the shortage of available transport companies and delays at our borders – even if the product is available elsewhere. Typically, Canada is a small portion of the consumers the manufacturer will be selling to, and we're often waiting for the leftover allocation from the larger markets in the U.S. This upcoming season, I would expect similar delays in both production and transport with the ongoing pandemic restrictions.

"Specifically speaking of Edmonton, we have a few large rail and highway transport and aviation hubs and typically we've had access to everything we want within 72 hours. We entered a world with the Coronavirus where to get a part might mean that we're using a

donor item off a different RV that is already unsellable because it's also waiting on a part. This would have been unheard of before but is becoming increasingly common.

"Regarding general consumer behavior, the biggest thing that COVID has done is that consumers understand that the rate of inflation is unprecedented and completely

out of control because the supply is nonexistent. In traditional years, you would see consumers spending weeks shopping to ensure that they're not overpaying by a few hundred or thousand dollars. Now, I would say that the average consumer is more terrified that they won't have a unit to use for a holiday for their family and they have become increasingly more decisive.

"In Alberta, we often operate in a bubble. I feel like the rest of the country is not necessarily operating the same as we are. The whole country will have good and bad markets, depending on the timing, but that will not necessarily be in line with what is happening in our province.

"Our specific market conditions in Alberta's RV and 'toy' industry (boats, quads, etc.) will ebb and flow almost entirely with our local industry, which has traditionally been driven by oil and gas prices. We have oil towns where the population doubles when they're drilling oil or building a pipeline. ... More than two-thirds of our buyers are not from our local metro area, and we rely on their business to make our business work and keep Albertans employed.

"We have seen RVing become more mainstream. I believe that the world itself is looking for a return to a simpler and less chaotic lifestyle, away from the busy-ness that has become a normal state for many people. COVID has amplified this, as we've moved into a world where people are forced to make changes to how they live and what activities they can do.

"Restrictions in Canada are making traditional travel and large events increasingly difficult to attend. This naturally pushes people to find new ways to travel or vacation and changes how they spend their leisure time. For many, the camping lifestyle may become the only viable option for vacation or travel.

"Looking to the upcoming year, we seem to be heading full-on into the next wave of this pandemic and we're shutting down social events and blocking travel. As that continues, I believe it will continue to push more people into this type of lifestyle as a holiday or how they spend their weekends." **RV**



# The Right Stuff ... Do You Have It?

With the busy summer selling season approaching, it's important for parts managers to take stock of what products are on-hand, what ordered inventory has yet to arrive and what products are expected to be in demand.



By Mel Selway

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

Many of you have recently attended – either in person or digitally – supplier expositions to learn about and possibly purchase accessories and supplies for your customers' RVs. Assuming that you have, or are intending to, purchase goods for offering to your customers in the next several months, there are some factors related to those purchases that you might consider.

With respect to these purchases, five assumptions are made, which are that:

- Several, if not all, of these purchases are intended to cover a period of at least three months and possibly as long as six months;
- Some of the products are new to your inventory;
- There could be point-of-purchase (P.O.P.) displays or signage available for some of the products;
- Some of these products can be re-ordered; and
- Demand for each of these products will vary.

Each of these assumptions initiate a few questions for which your parts and accessories manager should have answers. Let's review some of these questions.

## How Much Was Ordered?

Each supplier probably offered some incentives to place these orders. These incentives could include payment terms, discounts, free merchandise, P.O.P. materials, and product training. These incentives are usually offered so the supplier can gauge anticipated demand ahead of the actual period in which your customers will be requesting these goods.

Depending on the incentives offered by each supplier, your parts and accessories manager will have decided on the period for which he is calculating the quantity required to satisfy the needs and wants of your customers.

Let's assume that he ordered for a four-month period, and let's also assume that most of these orders will be filled, and that each shipment will arrive at one time. For items that have a demand

history in your DMS (dealership management system) database, he could have used the suggested order function to calculate an estimated quantity for each of these items. However, for products that are new to his parts and accessory inventories, he would have to make educated guesses as to the quantity of each that *might sell*.

**The questions for this topic are:** How will your parts and accessories manager track the demand for these items to determine if the quantity ordered and received is meeting the demand? What tools are available to assist him in determining if an additional quantity of a specific item is needed to be ordered? When should he begin tracking the supply versus the demand for each item – especially those that are new to his inventory?

Some possible answers to this set of questions could be:

- Establish *minimum stock levels* that could automatically trigger a re-order quantity for an item if the on-hand quantity reaches or falls below that level;
- Ask for feedback from parts associates and major unit sales agents regarding the demand for items – especially those new to your inventory this year;
- Begin tracking usage at least 30 days after receipt of each shipment;
- For each supplier's shipment, create a report that identifies each item received on a specific date (date the shipment was received) and that also shows the on-hand quantity and the total sales to date;
- For any high-demand items that are not available for subsequent orders, establish a relationship with other dealers who might be willing to swap or sell these products to your business (similar to the DX process where dealerships exchange major units to meet a customer demand).





**It's imperative that your parts manager track the demand for aftermarket parts and accessories to determine if the quantity ordered and received is meeting the demand, or if more supplies need to be ordered.**

By initiating any or all of these processes, your parts and accessories manager has a better opportunity to place subsequent orders for items that are selling at a greater rate than anticipated; and to identify those products that are selling at a slower pace than is justified by the level of inventory and which might require some attention.

### **How & Where Are These Products Merchandised?**

As mentioned previously, some of these products might be new to your P&A inventories and a few of them might have been shipped with a P.O.P. display or signage. The special product focus in the January issue of *RV PRO* contained information about P.O.P. displays and signage. Have you and your P&A manager read this piece? Also in the January issue was a column by Linda Cahan (see the weblink running at the bottom of this column) that contained some suggestions that could possibly enhance your P&A retail area. Which of those *best practices* could be applied in your RV business?

**Questions for this topic include:** What areas or display fixtures are the “hot spots” that customers tend to visit most frequently? How frequently does your P&A manager walk throughout the display fixtures to determine which require maintenance? How does your P&A manager inform customers that an out-of-stock item is on order and due to arrive by a specific date?

Some DMS include a function that identifies the volume (dollars and/or pieces) of goods sold in each display fixture. This reporting function could identify “hot spots” in your display area(s).

If your DMS doesn't offer that function, your P&A manager

could use Cahan's suggestion to scan a P&A display area for 30 to 60 seconds and record the first five things she sees. Then, he should ask other of your personnel to replicate that scanning task to record the first five items each of them observes.

This could assist in identifying the “hot spots” that your customers see – and therefore where he should display items to which he wants to attract customers. This might help to increase demand for slower moving goods.

Does your P&A manager practice MBWA – Management By Walking Around? If he walked through his department – especially the display areas – he might notice empty hooks or unattractive displays. By recording these observations, he could assign maintenance tasks to his parts associates.

When did your P&A manager schedule a staff meeting to inform his parts associates (and possibly major unit sales associates and service advisors) of any new products that will be available this year? During this meeting, was there any brainstorming as to how these new products could be merchandised – whether through actual P.O.P. displays or via verbal mentions of these items?

For any new products that require installation, when did he contact the service manager to coordinate any training for the technicians who will be installing these items?

When did the P&A manager contact the major unit sales manager and the service manager to discuss the possibility of installing some of these new products in an RV so that customers could see how the products will look in use?

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For those items that are currently *out of stock*, Cahan in her guest column suggests a sign to indicate that the product is currently on order and will be arriving on a specific date. However, images usually attract more attention than words. I suggest creating a laminated card containing a photo of the product, a note that the item is on order, and an invitation to the customer to contact a parts associate who will place a hold on the item when it arrives. This provides the opportunity to pre-sell the product before the order arrives.

### **Is the Porridge Too Cold?**

Perhaps you know the fable of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. As with the situation that Goldilocks faced, your P&A manager could find that some items are not achieving a demand sufficient to support the on-hand quantity of those items.

**Questions for this condition:** What actions could your P&A manager take to offset this high supply-low demand situation? What options are available to him? How would he be aware of these alternatives?

Possible responses could include – yet not be limited to:

- Place some or all of these products in the “hot spots” that he has identified with him scanning procedure;
- Incentivize his parts associates to present these items to each customer with whom they interact whether in person or via phone, text or email;
- Create a list of these items and ask the major unit sales manager and the service manager to incentivize their associates to present these items to customers;
- Contact the supplier representatives and request to return these items in a swap for other of their products that are in demand in his area;
- Implement the allowable return policy that some suppliers might have established for these products;
- Develop a mark-down process that reduces the selling price each day/week to encourage customers to take advantage of these reduced prices;
- Educate himself in the policies and procedures under which each of his suppliers operates so that he is aware of options available for slow-moving or non-moving products.

### **What’cha Gonna Do?**

As Cahan mentions in her January column: “Some fixes are free, others are easy, and the ones you tend to avoid can be time-intensive and costly to implement.”

And, as I have stated in many of my columns, most of my suggestions will require efforts on your part to implement. Some require more effort than others.

Whatever you decide, the important issue becomes the actual implementation. Don’t say that you will try to do it, because, to quote Yoda: Do or do not. There is no *try*.

Wishing each of you success in 2022! **RV2**

**Read Linda Cahan’s January Guest Column:**

<https://nbm.uberflip.com/i/1437999-january-22/76?>



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# News of Note

Breaking news exclusives

## Blue Ox Promotes Cole to Director of Automotive Sales



Blue Ox Products has promoted **Chad Cole** to director of automotive sales.

Cole will continue in his current role as West Coast regional manager until a replacement is named.

“When I look back at the last five years and the progress we have made with Blue Ox in the RV Industry, I am confident in equal success for our new automotive

division,” said Cole.

“Cole’s appointment will benefit our developing relationships with automotive parts dealers and focus Blue Ox offerings in the automotive category. With the recent addition of our adjustable ball mounts and many more new products and innovations slated for the future, we will continue to extend the heritage of quality synonymous with Blue Ox for a new group of towing enthusiasts, said CEO **Mike Hesse**.

“Blue Ox is known as the number one supplier in aftermarket towing, especially with RV dealerships,” added Hesse. “Chad Cole is the perfect choice to lead the Blue Ox Automotive Sales Division as we continue to diversify our product lines for everything towing.”

## Gary Conley Named VP/GM for Lance Camper

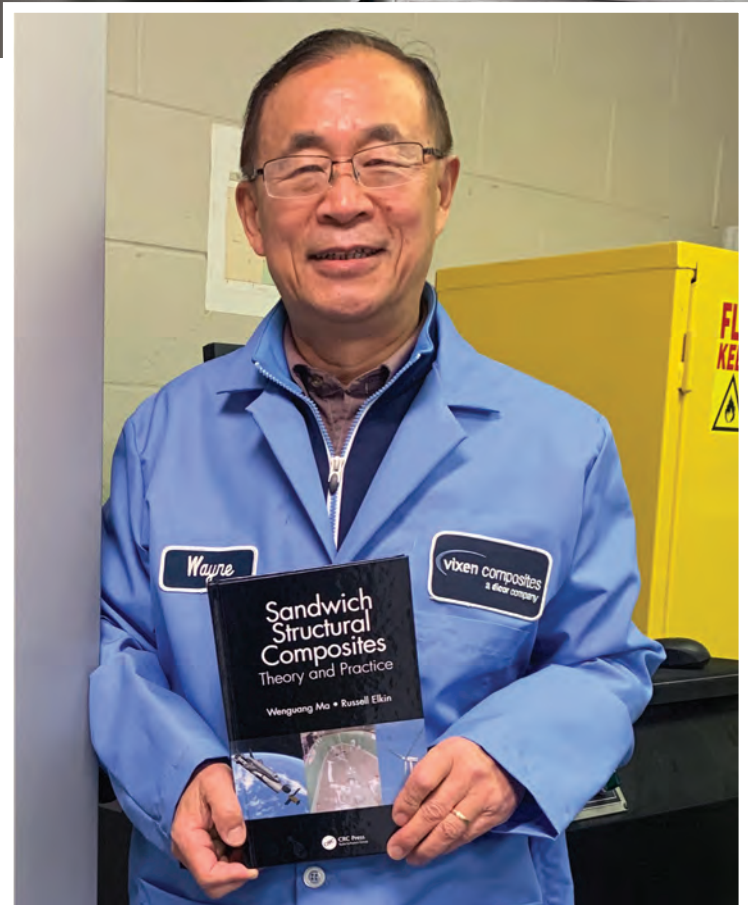


California-based Lance Camper has appointed **Gary Conley** as its vice president and general manager. Conley will report to **Mike Lanciotti**, president of parent company REV Recreation Group.

“We are very pleased to be able to promote Gary to the leadership position at Lance Camper. Gary has been an integral part of the legacy brands success of the past

40 years and has the experience to take Lance to the next level,” said Lanciotti.

Conley began his career at Lance nearly four decades ago, working as a sales manager and store manager at Lance Camper Sales & Service. He then was appointed as a purchasing manager, where he established the first digital purchasing system for the company. For the last 29 years, Conley held the role of national sales manager and established a dealer network as well as helped to design new products.



## Vixen Director Authors Book on Composites

**Wenguang “Wayne” Ma**, director of technical operations at Vixen Composites, an Airxcel brand, has coauthored *Sandwich Structural Composites: Theory and Practice*. The scholarly publication offers a comprehensive look at a common but critical component of modern boat and RV manufacturing.

Published by Routledge, *Sandwich Structural Composites: Theory and Practice* covers current composite sandwich manufacturing processes and methodology and provides a detailed overview of raw materials. It describes the characterization and finite element analysis of structures, and related benefits such as acoustic, thermal and fire protection. The book looks at applications within various industries including marine, RV, aerospace and wind energy.

“Dr. Ma has been a visionary in the field of sandwich composites,” said **Anthony Wollschlager**, Airxcel group president. “We’re very proud of his accomplishment and appreciative of his expertise that is playing an important role in advancing manufacturing technology for our core market partners.”

A product expert and leading authority on sandwich composites, polymer foam, polymer blending and modification, and biodegradable polymers, Ma holds a Ph.D. in plastics engineering from the University of Massachusetts Lowell. He is the director of technical operations at Vixen Composites, a manufacturer of custom composite panels and fiberglass reinforced plastics. **RVP**



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