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- *Q&A with Northern Wholesale's Chad Smith*

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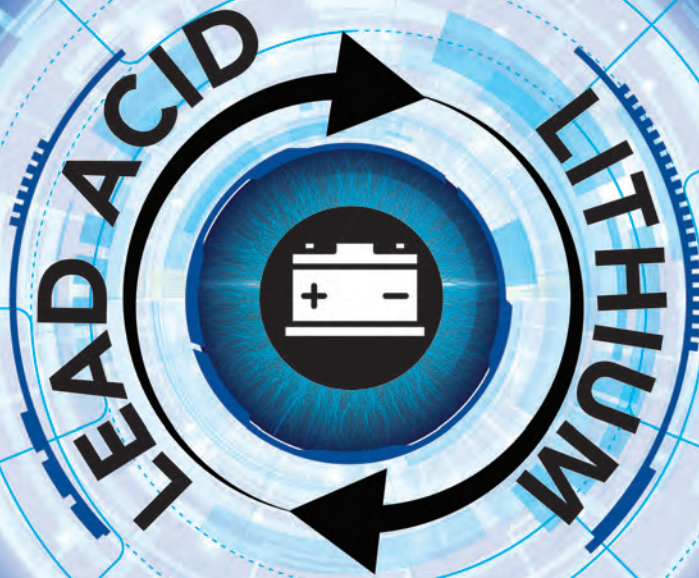
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ABOUT THE COVER:
Wade's RV founder and owner Wade Reeves is pictured on his sales lot in front of one of the Newmar coaches his dealership sells. From modest beginnings, the dealership has grown to become a multi-million-dollar sales operation with four locations in Oklahoma.

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A Matter of Perspective



Bradley Worrell
EDITOR
brad@nbm.com

When my 12-year-old grandson visits, he often likes to challenge me to some one-on-one basketball in my front driveway.

When we play, I don't play like I would against someone my own age ... but I don't make it too easy for him, either, believing that giving him some competition helps him sharpen his skills.

The last time we played, he scored several points on me early on, giving him a wide lead. So, to balance things out, I started covering him a bit more aggressively and using my (slight) height advantage, with arms raised high, to block more of his shots.

"Too tall! You're too tall!" he said at one point, clearly exasperated.

At that moment, I let out one of the biggest bellyaching laughs that I have in a long, long time.

Here's the thing you should know about me, if we have not met in person at a show or other industry event in the 17 years I've been doing this job for *RV PRO*: I am exactly 5 foot, 2 inches tall. And no one – and I mean no one, ever – has previously accused me of being *too tall*.

But then, I supposed that depends upon your viewpoint. Compared to your average adult male, I'm definitely on the short side, but playing one-on-one against my young grandson, I apparently seem a lot more like Andre the Giant.

Ultimately, it's a matter of perspective.

I share that story now, as the RV industry is experiencing both the best and worst of times at the same exact time. On the best end of the equation, RV shipments and sales are absolutely off the charts and discounting is rarely needed to get customers to buy a new RV. However, on the other end, many dealers say getting replacement inventory is challenging, and there are obstacles related to employee staffing, complying with local government COVID-19 regulations and more.

On that note, be sure to check out this month's dealer trends feature to see what some prominent retailers from across the country are saying about conditions in their respective markets. It's clear from the article that market conditions on the ground vary greatly by region.

Speaking of perspective, I'd like to take a moment to talk about the cancellation of Elkhart Open House Week and how it informed our decision to highlight standout 2022 models in this issue.

You might think that the absence of a formal show where participants can tour literally hundreds of RVs would make it more challenging to come up with a detailed list of standout products for 2022 – but you would be wrong, at least in this case.

As we reached out to OEM reps, we found they had plenty to share, and a result, we found ourselves more challenged than ever to narrow a list of winners to a manageable level. Ultimately, we increased the number of standout products we recognize by about one-fifth – and we could have easily come up with plenty more models to highlight, except for our desire to create a select list of winners. (Because, really, if nearly every new RV gets recognized for one thing or another, ultimately, how special is that recognition?)

As always, thanks for reading.

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Service with a Smile

PHOTOS BY TOM GILBERT

By Rob Merwin

Wade's RV got its start in service before becoming a multi-location, multi-million-dollar sales machine – and service remains the backbone of the business today.

Wade's RV is a rapidly expanding four-location Oklahoma dealership with stores in Glenpool, Goldsby and Sand Springs, and is one of the state's largest dealers, retailing 30 brands with a minimum of 500 RVs on its sales lots at any time and a staff of more than 70 employees.

"We have passion for what we do and for our customers and service," says founder and owner Wade Reeves, who got an early start in the industry. His first job out of high school was at a dealership – detailing, sweeping the shop, mowing the grass, taking out the trash – doing whatever was needed.

"Growing up in the country and on a farm, you learn how to fix things, so I got my real start in the repair shop and became service manager," he says.

Reeves spent 23 years in that capacity and grew the department. After cutting his teeth in the shop, he set out on his own in 2005.

"I had the drive, the initiative, and put in the hours," he says simply.

After a year of leasing in Glenpool, Reeves used \$25,000 of his home's equity toward the \$1 million price tag of the facility.

"It was, 'Here we go' – it was make it or break it," he explains.

He first solely focused on service, noting, "I had no units to sell at the beginning. All I had was a tool box and two other people."

Within three years, however, Reeves had doubled the dealership's size by acquiring neighboring property as he built inventory – all used units at the time – and outgrew its space. He also built an indoor RV storage building around its perimeter. As time progressed, so did the need for further expansion and another location in Glenpool on 10 acres, which also included additional indoor storage.



This aerial shot of Wade's RV in Glenpool, just outside of Tulsa, provides a sense of the size of the operation. The dealership offers a mix of new and used inventory, has a large parts and service operation, and offers RV storage for its customers.



Owner Wade Reeves is pictured in front of a new Newmar Mountain Aire motorhome. Reeves said Newmar wanted to partner with the dealership because of the RV retailer's strong focus on customer service.





Reeves is pictured in one of his dealership's service bays. Reeves spent two decades in the service side of a dealership before launching his own business in 2005. He still helps out in the service department when the need arises.



A service technician works on a power cord that's not working. The dealership can tackle nearly any repair job, big or small.

Reeves has a kindred spirit for service in his general manager, Randy Sloan, who has been in the RV industry for more than 40 years – since he was 13 and installing AC units and wiring trucks. “I haven’t done anything else since the late 1970s. I had always been the ‘shop guy’ and service manager all my life until I moved into sales 25 years ago,” Sloan says.

Since then, Sloan has been a general manager at two different dealerships before arriving at Wade’s RV.

“I’ve been playing in Wade’s ‘sandbox’ since he started his new dealership in Glenpool,” he says.

Sloan now manages operations out of the dealership’s new location in Goldsby, located in the Oklahoma City area, which is a new facility built four months ago on 20 acres.

“We’re putting everything together – we’ve black-topped the entire area that also includes indoor and outdoor storage and an eight-bay service shop,” he says. “We’re starting to ‘load the wagons’ with inventory from our manufacturers who we’ve have good relationships with over the decades. For the short period of time we’ve been open in Goldsby, we’ve been just killing it in sales, parts and service.”

Service is the Dealership’s Backbone

As both men’s industry backgrounds are firmly rooted in service, it’s become the backbone of the business, according to Reeves.

“There are some people who are just looking for price, but the vast majority of customers want to buy from someone who can take care of them and not have to worry about any issues,” he says. “Service has always held the greatest value. Without it, you can’t meet your customers’ needs, because these RVs are like houses on wheels that have an earthquake-like experience traveling down the road. There’s going to be little things along the way that will

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A dealership parts representative checks his computer in order to find a needed part for a customer.



Once the dealership takes possession of a new RV, it performs a detailed PDI on each unit and then makes sure they are thoroughly cleaned before customers see them.

need attention. Our ultimate goal is to take care of our customers.”

Sloan is quick to add that Reeves is often the first to begin the day at the dealership and heads right to the service department to make sure everything is on track and on time for delivery.

“Wade drops his briefcase in the office and heads right to the shop because he wants everything to be ready, detailed and looking sharp,” Sloan says. “By 9 a.m., he could wring out his shirt – that’s how much passion he has. When customers come in, they always want to talk to Wade and he’s always available if there’s an issue. He’s the only dealership owner I know of that gives out his cell phone to everyone – they all have his number. We’ve sold thousands of RVs and every customer can call or text Wade if there’s a problem.”

Much of the dealership’s profits are invested right back into the business, whether it’s buying new tools and equipment or building a new location and facility, according to Reeves.

Wade’s RV features a lift in its service department that can elevate a motorhome like a car so that a technician can stand beneath it for inspections and repairs. Collectively, there are 32 bays among the dealership’s multiple locations, with nearly a technician for each bay.

“I like to hire techs who have a good mechanical knowledge and have diagnostic skills. I don’t care if they can’t spell ‘RV,’” Sloan chuckles. “If they have basic skills, then we can train them to be top techs. We grow our own.”

Service can’t be anymore important than it already is, Reeves adds, and there will be more demand for it as RV sales continue to climb.

“We’re seeing a lot of people – about 38 percent – who come in without a trade and have never RVed before, so we educate them and conduct a three- to four-hour demo when they come to pick up their unit,” Reeves says. “We take care of them, and when they come in for any type of service, we’re one-on-one and talking with them.

“They tell us they wished they had gotten into RVing sooner,” he adds. “If all dealers take care of their customers with top service, then this industry will continue to grow and be a bigger and better community of RVers. We hear wonderful stories daily.”

Getting Supply to Meet Demand

Wade’s RV carries a variety of lines that include the entire spectrum of RVs from Class A motorhomes to travel trailers and toy haulers.

“It’s hard to get inventory right now, but we’re stocked. Once we get our buses in, they sell like there’s no tomorrow,” Sloan says.

The dealership typically keeps a minimum inventory of 250 to 300 units in Glenpool and 200 in Goldsby, although with current supply challenges those numbers are lower, and half of the dealership’s present inventory is used.

“We have such good relationships with Forest River and everyone

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Pictured here are just a few RVs on the sales lot of Wade's RV in Glenpool. The dealership carries new inventory from Coachmen, Forest River, Heartland and Jayco, to name just a few manufacturers.



Reeves gives potential customers a guided tour of a Newmar motorhome, taking care to point out the smallest details inside the coach and out.

under the THOR umbrella that they're doing a great job of getting us inventory," Sloan says. "In speaking with various sales reps, the manufacturers are focused on supplying their customers they've had over the years, rather than new ones. We've been selling them as fast as we're getting them.

"I've always been straightforward with our manufacturers and when I told them I was going to take a certain number of units, I've always followed through – in good times and bad," he adds. "They can take it to the bank. While the industry is big, it's still pretty small and there's a lot of the same faces that I've grown up with over the years. There's been a lot of trust built up."

Reeves calls Newmar one of the best manufacturers in the industry when it comes to service and the quality of construction, so the dealership is proud of its relationship with the RV manufacturer.

"They came to us – we didn't seek them out. I wasn't even aware it was an opportunity that could've happened at the time," Reeves says. "Newmar came to the dealership and sought me out. We didn't even know he was coming by, but he said he had heard good things about us."

The first store in Glenpool has been transformed into a full-service center that has grown with a paint booth for bodywork and more extensive repairs. The second location in Glenpool, which the dealership has already outgrown, also features a large service facility. Reeves has bought 30 acres nearby as well as an additional property for a total of 62 acres for another building for sales and more storage.

"I was the first dealer to begin in service and then end up in sales with indoor storage," Reeves says. "We cater to our indoor storage customers because if they need any service, we're here



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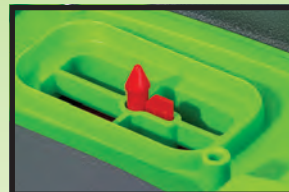
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A service tech prepares to work on a fifth wheel slide-out. Between the dealership's three locations, it has 32 bays, with nearly a technician for each bay.



Pictured here is the dealership's newest location in Goldsby, Oklahoma, just south of Oklahoma City.



Reeves is pictured inside one of the luxury coaches his dealership sells.

for them, while we keep their RVs plugged in and ready to go.”

In addition to the recently acquired 62 acres with plans for expansion in Glenpool, Wade's RV is planning on more acreage for its Goldsby location.

“That’s going to happen soon because we’re almost out of vacancies,” Reeves says. “And everything is paid for – we’re not in debt for anything. We’re going to keep rolling and building in different areas and states.”

The five-year plan includes two new dealerships, for which a building has already been ordered for a locale in either Poteau or Fort Smith, Ark.

“We’re getting out stats right now to find out what’s selling and how much in the different areas,” Sloan says. “We just have to figure out what location we’re putting the building.”

It’s important not to overpopulate an area with dealerships, Reeves says.

“We’re not trying to come into town and take anything away from anybody – we’re not bullies,” he says. “We want to make sure there’s enough market share for everyone. Customers who traveled to us from Oklahoma City would often tell us they wished we had a store in their area and it would do well. They were right, so here we come.”

Sloan adds that it’s also important to review registrations in a region to calculate what is being bought in an area and if the location can handle another dealership. “Our objective isn’t to put anyone out of business, we just want to service customers.”

In order to meet customer demand, Wade's RV has also added manufacturers to its line card.

“Since Open House was closed, I was on the phone with several of the reps,” Sloan says. “They still want to meet with us, so I’ll be making the trip in the next two weeks to see more product and get more units.”

Newly acquired RVs include Coachmen’s Leprechaun, Catalina and Cross Trail; Forest River’s Impression; Jayco diesel Entegras; Radiance by Cruiser; Torque by Heartland and Prime Time Manufacturing’s Crusader.

“We’ve taken on quite a few and we’ll continue to grow those lines,” says Reeves, adding that the dealership’s latest location is in Sand Springs and focuses on marine products, though it also has a few RVs.

“We’re growing by leaps and bounds. And we’re now selling to four generations of a family. We have both been in this business since we were kids and we still have a long way to go – we’re going to do a lot in the next 10 years,” Reeves says. “All we have to do is show up everyday and do the right thing – and good things happen to us. We don’t come to work – we come to meet new families and make new friends.” **RV2**



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DEALER TRENDS:

Evaluating Market Conditions in 2021

By Lisa Dicksteen



Twice last year, *RV PRO* talked to dealers nationwide about the effect the pandemic was having on RV sales, supplies, employee staffing and overall market conditions in their local area. Recently, *RV PRO* returned to some of those dealers to see how late 2021 compares. Here's what they told us.

Ben Hirsch, CEO

Campers Inn RV
Jacksonville, Fla.

"RV inventory remains constrained due to supply chain challenges. Many of those we faced last year continue. It has even become a bit worse in certain segments of the motorhome industry. Unfortunately, the current supply chain issues will likely continue well into 2023.

"Parts inventories are similar. We're finding alternative parts, but some just can't be switched. And special order or specialty parts – especially those specific to a particular make or model – are much more challenging to access than they were a year ago.

"There's no question that the employment market is hot right now and finding qualified candidates is difficult. We have training programs for technicians, parts, service, sales, and finance, so we don't need people with a lot of experience. However, it's still difficult to find people who are willing to come in as entry-level employees and receive training.

"As for money, we are still seeing price increases on new and used RVs and parts. This is concerning, since the customer is now paying much more for the same RV, which could lead to concerns down the road as demand softens. On the other hand, the availability of financing has remained steady over the last year.

"As the largest family-owned and -operated consolidator in the U.S., with 28 locations, we believe we provide choice to those dealers that want to sell. We are going to continue to grow, but we will do it in a way that benefits all our stakeholders, including the selling dealers, their employees, their customers and our industry partners.

"COVID has required a lot of regulatory changes over the past year, but other regulations have been relatively steady."

Darrel Friesen, president

Redding RV Center
Yuba City, Calif.

"We are still struggling to obtain rolling stock. The manufacturers seem to be favoring supplying the big chains product and neglecting the independents. I haven't had 10 units on my lot in over a year despite having hundreds on order.

"Parts inventory, or lack thereof, is hurting my parts and service departments. The suppliers are sending available product to the manufacturers first before dealers and wholesalers.

"I have had a price increase from the various manufacturers in six of seven months, citing supplies and having to pay more for labor. I needed to raise my labor rate due to the same labor issues they cited but was turned down and told only one increase per 12-month period of time. (It's) 'Do as I say, not as I do!'

"Finding people willing to work is also near impossible. It's hard to get someone to work when the Feds and some states are paying and encouraging people to stay home. In some cases, it is more money than they made when they had a job.

"Obtaining financing hasn't really changed, except for maybe slight interest increases.

"The mega-dealers haven't really affected us, with the exception of them getting all the inventory, and government regulations haven't affected my local counties."

Brian Wilkins, owner

Wilkins RV
Bath, N.Y.

"Finding inventory has been challenging since probably the middle of last summer. We have to sell from an emptier shelf

than we're used to, and margins have crept up because you're dealing with older inventory.

"If we had more units, we could sell more units, but we've stretched our service department to maximum capacity. It might not have been responsible to sell another 10 percent even if we had it.

"Parts are even more difficult. When we can't get parts for someone who has spent tens of thousands of dollars on an RV and now cannot use it, or cannot use it to their expectations, it causes problems. As always, some customers get it, some don't.

"It's also a tough environment for staffing. The area we're trying to ramp up is service and support. We have more customers because we sold more RVs, so now we have more customers needing service and support.

"You can't help but think higher prices are what's going to extinguish this good market. People are being priced out. Over the past 30 to 45 days, things seem to be beginning to normalize. Year over year, we're closer to last year. Inventory was really low in July and prices went up. It may be due to consumers driving inventory down and prices up. Maybe we just have to wait until next spring and see what happens.

"On the other hand, credit is pretty available. Rates are good. It's a good economy and banks are looking to lend money.

"COVID regulations were difficult to keep track of. We started out permitted to operate at 50 percent capacity, the next day it went to 25 percent, then it went to essential employees only – all within 48 hours. The hard thing is to figure out exactly what the regulation means and how to comply with it.

"We don't have concerns about acquisitions. We're doing one right now, and we're always looking at new opportunities and ways to grow. As industries mature, they consolidate. Our industry has been in the middle of that for about 10 years. I don't see any sign of slowing.

"Overall, this is a good time to be in the RV business. In the future, this is the time we're going to look back on as a good time in the industry."

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Bob Cox, president

Stoltzfus RV & Marine
Westchester, Pa.



“While pretty much all types of inventory are backlogged, motorized is the most difficult to replenish. The majority of what we receive is already sold and the new owners have been waiting quite a while and are very anxious to take delivery.

“Another challenge is the shipping delays and the amount of damage during shipment. New customers entering the RV world are not accustomed to waiting for parts and service. Our experienced RV owners understand; however, they are also frustrated at how much longer they now must wait. The current propane regulator recall is a good example. Regulators are on back order as more and more towables are affected.

“The difficulty finding qualified workers is nothing new in our industry. We find a person who fits our culture and values, then train them. You can train the right person to do the task, but you cannot change their morals, values or attitude.

“Price increases are one of our most crucial concerns. They are not the fault of our manufacturers, who are in a tough position right now. They have no control over price increases on raw materials. It’s very difficult for dealers to sell a unit to a customer, wait four months or more for it to arrive, and have the price increased by double digits. Customers are reluctant to order a new unit when there is a stipulation that the price may increase by the time it arrives. We live in unprecedented times and are instituting new procedures as we navigate them.

“Conversely, money is very available and affordable for us and our customers.”

Terry Sinkler, president

U-Neek RV Center
Kelso, Wash.



“Last September, we were sitting at about 30 percent of our normal inventory. This year, we’re barely at 10 percent. As a result, our sales volume has suffered. ...

“Overall, we will only get a fraction of what we normally see, which is frustrating. We’re starting to see some recovery and should have our largest inventory in over a year by the end of the month. However, that is still only a fraction of our normal inventory.

“Our store is slightly better stocked in terms of parts than this time last year, although we are still having major difficulty getting a lot of things we really need, like LP regulators. There are still a lot of products with no expected arrival time. Suppliers simply don’t know when they will get the product from the manufacturers.

“Finding workers continues to be a problem. We’re sitting pretty good right now, though we still have some positions we’d like to fill ... and experienced technicians remain the toughest people to find.

“Price increases have been insane. Who could have predicted so many increases in a years’ time? The dealer cost of an RV is 20 to 40 percent higher today than a year ago. We hope to see some

stabilization soon so we can create and maintain a more stable pricing structure. Now, we can’t pre-sell anything without the risk of a big increase in our price when the unit finally arrives.

“Luckily, financing has not gotten worse, although we are continuing to see more requirements for providing proof of income.

“Consolidation by mega-dealers is happening at a rate I’ve never seen before, and I’ve been in the business since I was 10 years old – and that was decades ago. It makes sense for those who want to expand or retire or move into another chapter of their life. The timing is good for that.

“Local, state and federal regulations are changing at a fast pace, making it difficult to stay in compliance. Government seems to be bored and trying to justify their work-from-home policies by coming up with new regulations, mandates and laws. What they don’t understand is they only have to look at one piece – the piece they are responsible for. A business has to look at all the pieces at the same time so they can try to stay open and in compliance. It gets exhausting very fast.

“After all that, I still have a positive feeling. I think manufacturers and suppliers will get caught up sometime in 2022. Overall, the RV industry is one of the few that has benefited from this terrible virus and should continue to do so for many years to come.”

Brett Trezell, GM

Carolina Coach/RV Realtor
Claremont, N.C.



“Last year at this time, our traffic was up substantially. Nothing has changed. With that, there are still no shows in our area, so we do promotions locally. We don’t need too much because demand is bringing people in – but shows would be better.

“On the other hand, we need units to sell. We have just now started receiving towables in greater numbers, but we are well short on motorized units. Our private labels have helped. We have the Free Soul (Braxton Creek), the Aurora (Forest River), and the Twilight and the Olympia (THOR/Jayco), which now has an entire factory dedicated just to manufacturing it.

“There are still some problems – in July and August we were down to only 30 units on the lot – but it has opened up. Today, we have 100. That’s just towables, of course. Motorized units are still difficult to get. Mercedes chassis are behind due to recalls and Chevy and Ford are also behind. We’ve been actively pursuing pre-owned A, B, and C Class units. That’s how we’ve gotten motorized units.

“Even with more units being built, most don’t have generators. There is a big issue getting some A/C units and refrigerators. But all parts are harder to get because there are more people buying RVs. ... As a result, while we normally have about 200 open tickets in the service department, now we have over 400. A lot are situations where we have done what we could to get the customer back on the road, but there are parts missing, such as trim, so we keep the ticket open until everything is done. I’ve had an awning on order for several months and I just learned it will be several more months before it arrives. And I’ve been waiting for a stove part for months

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and this morning I learned it will be six more weeks.

“I call my manufacturers every single day and ask for inventory based on the idea of being the squeaky wheel.

“The price of everything has gone up. Every email I receive from a manufacturer says they’re short on parts and ‘here are the new prices.’ Some go up three or four times a year – others have new prices every month.

“It is not just a case of supply and demand, where they’re taking advantage. The prices of steel, aluminum, wood and glue are up. In some cases, their expenses are more than the invoice price. We’ve asked for price protection on units that have been on order for months. Sometimes we get it. ...

“Even with prices going up, we have not had any financing issues. The rates are as low as I have ever seen them for a luxury recreational item and financing is going a little deeper. Now, if someone has a low to medium credit score but they are solid and have a good job, they are looking at them more.

“As for staff, my No. 1 goal is for the everyone to know our goals, so we’re all working together. No. 2 is making sure everyone feels appreciated and wants to stay. I’ve lost one level one tech in the past 90 days, but generally people stay here for years. ...

“More directly related to COVID, we haven’t had any issues

with regulations at the dealership level. The mask mandate was lifted months ago in our state. Now it’s done county by county and our county doesn’t have one.”

Christy Eagan, president/owner
Wisconsin RV World
Madison, Wis.



“I have four manufacturers and 10-plus brands and I’ve received 12 units total this year from three of them – the other seven-plus haven’t sent a single unit. My reps say if I have any aged inventory, I get no new inventory. So, we’re supposed to sell our 2020s at a minimal gross just to get rid of them, and then they say, ‘Sorry I don’t have anything for you.’ ...

“While we are still dealing with inventory issues, it truly depends on the part. Stock items are available – except appliances, awnings or toilets, which have been in high demand since the start of the pandemic. That is now extending to parts purchased directly from the manufacturer. Some manufacturers have reduced products available, and some have had wait times of between two and three months. Overall, it’s improving for day-to-day orders, but there are still products that I hesitate to put a timeframe on.



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“Price increases seem never-ending, although for us ‘small’ dealers – since we aren’t really getting any units – we aren’t feeling the hurt, yet, but when it comes, it will be sticker shock. It’s not just the price increases, which are huge ... but then you get freight surcharges, market surcharges, fuel surcharges. The prices are not coming down.

“Finding qualified workers is quite the daunting task – and then try and keep them! We’ve had a half-dozen people go through the process from resume to job acceptance and then just not show up for work.

“The next big thing is all the large buying up all the small dealers. ... The acquisition of all these small dealers is very unsettling. What’s their end goal once they buy out all the small dealers?

“Being next to a large, big-box store, every day our customers say, ‘It’s so nice to shop at a no-pressure, family-owned dealer.’ ...

“I don’t have a problem obtaining financing for my needs and we deal with a third party who is a total F&I solution provider, so my customers experience very few turn-downs or issues.”

Jeff Zimmerman, owner
Country Roads RV Center
Lexington, N.C.



“Inventory remains extremely difficult to get. I don’t see that changing anytime soon. It’s bad for everybody. Manufacturers cannot produce it. They’re only working 2.5 or three weeks out of the month because they can’t get the supplies they need.

“For parts, it’s more about logistics. For example, I just got something that had been sitting at the shipper’s depot since July 1. They just don’t have the staff.

“Getting techs continues to be a problem as the industry continues to grow. I read somewhere recently that RV tech is the fifth-fastest growing career in the country. We keep trying to impress that on the younger generation. What we really need is an RV curriculum in high schools and community colleges.

“Everybody is having a problem with price increases. It has gotten more and more expensive to ship from overseas. It used to cost \$1,500 to ship a container, now it costs \$17,000. When the wholesale price goes up, the retail price follows.

“Luckily, we’re not having any problems with regulations and we’re not seeing any problems with financing on the wholesale or retail sides.” *RVP*

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Up for Any Job

By Craig Young

Repair work on RVs and buses keeps Pennsylvania's Evolution Custom Coach busy, but creating rolling works of art is what truly inspires its owners and employees.



PHOTOS BY ROB HILL

White Haven, Pa.-based Evolution Custom Coach has made a name for itself thanks to its RV and bus renovation, restoration, customization and conversion projects. Pictured here are team members (front row, left to right): Angie Cherry, Mariano Medina, John Weaver, Beth Adams, and David Beck, and (second row, left to right): John Cherry, Justin Cherry, Keith Harter, Jason Cruikshank and Maxwell Hite.

"Everyone here is an artist. This is a massive co-op of artists being able to be creative. We're creating art – and people are paying us to do it. It's not art that you hang on a museum wall – it's fluid, it's got motion and we become part of it."

– John Cherry, Evolution Custom Coach co-owner

Evolution Custom Coach, a family-owned business in the Poconos area of eastern Pennsylvania, features a long list of services, from basic repairs to sales of new and used buses to creating custom conversions.

It's the repair work on RVs and buses that pay the bills and allow the company's "artists" to spend time on the fun part of the job: Creating something new from a bus or motorhome, according to the owners.

"Repair, that's a big part," says John Cherry, who founded the company in 2002 with his friend, Jason Cruikshank. "The part of the business which pays the bills and keeps us eating is doing repairs."

In a riverfront location in the small community of White Haven, population 1,100, Evolution Custom Coach sits in a "paradise" of natural beauty, Cherry says, with Interstate 80 half a mile away and state parks all around.

At nearby Hickory Run State Park, "all the rangers steadily call me," he says. A family might be having trouble with a slide-out or a malfunctioning appliance. Or someone on a trip has a breakdown and calls Evolution Custom Coach, which offers emergency roadside service and towing. "I get a lot of call-outs."

Co-owner Cruikshank adds: "We get people pulling up with their broken whatever all summer long."

For example, Cherry says, "A guy was going down the road with his travel trailer. ... He had a blowout and (the tire) grabbed his wiring, just ripped the wiring, the electrical 110 system, out of the trailer, and the propane line. We put it all back together. We did it really quickly," he says. "We try to get them (repaired) real fast so they can get out and enjoy them with their families."



Evolution Custom Coach works on several renovation and conversion projects at the same time, as evidenced by the multiple buses pictured here in its service bays. In addition to renovation and customization projects, the business performs a variety of standard service jobs, including repairing air conditioners, installing generators, windshield replacements, and satellite dish repairs and installations.

Evolution Custom Coach's services include collision repair, custom painting, plumbing and electrical repair and upgrades, light fixture upgrades, audio-visual installation, flooring and carpet installation, custom upholstery, windshield and window replacement, satellite system installation and repair, air conditioning service, winterization, accessory installation, and automation.

It's important to Cherry to help "everyone get out and experience things we did as young'uns."

Company's RV Roots Run Deep

"I come from an RV background," he explains. His grandfather, John Serro, started making and selling small teardrop camper trailers in 1957, and the company manufactured an expanding line of its popular camper trailers for the next four decades, according to the website of the National Serro Scotty Organization. The retro Scotty trailers still have a loyal following.

"My granddad was an innovator," Cherry says. "He wanted something to sleep in when he went hunting. ... I grew up in a camper factory in Irwin, Pa. Pretty much I spent every summer there. ... I used to pick up screws for a penny apiece."

His family embraced the RV lifestyle when he was growing up, he says.

"The camper trailer is what I was familiar with my whole life," he says. "I've seen a lot of America."



Harter (left) and Justin Cherry work on Corian countertops that will be desktops for a bus that is being converted into a mobile classroom. New flooring, carpentry, cabinetry and countertops are just some of the interior projects Evolution Custom Coach undertakes for clients.



Evolution Custom Coach projects include VIP coach builds, entertainment coaches, mobile command centers and mobile offices, campaign buses, survival vehicles, mobile showrooms, and off-road motorhomes, to name just a few.



As a relatively small operation, Evolution Custom Coach's skilled workers perform a variety of tasks. Here, Harter sews custom seating for a coach that is being overhauled.

Evolution Custom Coach's talented staff use power saws, industrial sewing machines and other tools to create mobile works of art in the form of customized RVs and buses.



When he was working as a sales manager at an RV center, he enjoyed reading magazine articles about coach conversions.

"I tried to buy one, but they were a million dollars," he recalls. "I thought I'd build my own."

He started with a Motor Coach Industries MC-9, and to make some money, he completed a bus for a friend while he was working on his, Cherry says. Eventually, he and Cruikshank came up with the idea of starting a bus-conversion business. That was in Scranton, Pa., in 2002.

"When I told my wife's father we were going to do this, he said we were idiots," Cherry says. "There was no way I was going to quit and let her dad say, 'I told you so.'"

"I was almost done with my bus when we started the business," he says. "I left my job to start running the shop, and Jay (Cruikshank) worked for the telephone company."

It turns out that his father-in-law, Frank Tavaris, had a change in his own job situation, and he joined the business shortly after it launched. Tavaris now is the company president and treasurer. Cherry's wife, Angie Cherry, is a co-owner, vice president, and secretary, and she manages the office. John Cherry is a co-owner and manager. And Cruikshank is a co-owner who is involved in the day-to-day wood-working, fabrication, and anything else that needs doing.

Angie Cherry, who went to school for architectural engineering, left a job designing roads and bridges for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to join the business. Now she draws up floorplans for the RVs and buses.

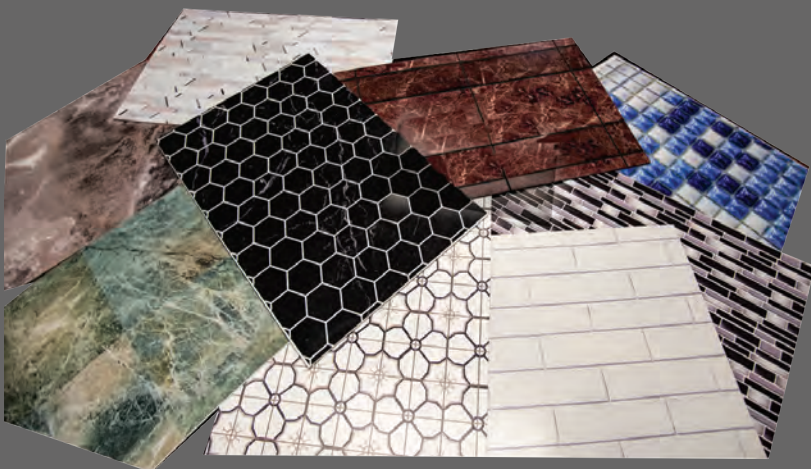
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This converted bus, which has been highly modified inside and out, is called the Global Xplorer. A few highlighted product features include thermal imaging cameras, night vision surrounding the vehicle, custom specialized lighting, power spare tire retrieval and stow harness and central tire inflation system.

“Isn’t that the idea of a custom RV – getting an RV that fits you? I can take your average RV and turn it into whatever you want it to be.”

– John Cherry, Evolution Custom Coach co-owner

Cruikshank went to school for mechanical engineering, and “my background is just in tinkering with things,” he says.

Additionally, John Cherry’s son, Justin Cherry (Angie Cherry’s stepson), is a welder and fabricator in the business.

“I get to work with my own son every day,” Cherry says. “He’s a 2.0 version of me. He can do almost everything better than I can.

“It’s been a struggle to get where I’m at,” Cherry adds. “It was hard to get anyone to let us work on their buses (at first). The auto parts store down the street took pity on us and gave us their old forklifts to fix.”

The business moved to White Haven in 2004 when a building there became available. Evolution Custom Coach now has six buildings on 6 acres.

While the demand for the company’s services today is varied and continual, Cherry and Cruikshank say their business is facing a problem common to many companies in the industry: A shortage of skilled repair technicians.

“I’m supposed to have 29 (employees), but I have just 11 right now,” Cherry says.

“There’s a revolving door,” says Cruikshank. “It’s hard to keep techs. People are just fickle these days. They come, they go.”

And so, the people at the business who have been around the longest and who have the skills train the new people, he adds.

“I prefer somebody that comes to me with no skills,” Cherry says. “I prefer to train my people to the way we build.”

That way, he can teach the worker what it takes to build or repair something that will withstand the equivalent of a major earthquake and an 80-plus mph windstorm.

“We don’t use any nails; everything is screwed and glued,” Cherry says. “It’s a craft. It’s a major skill.”



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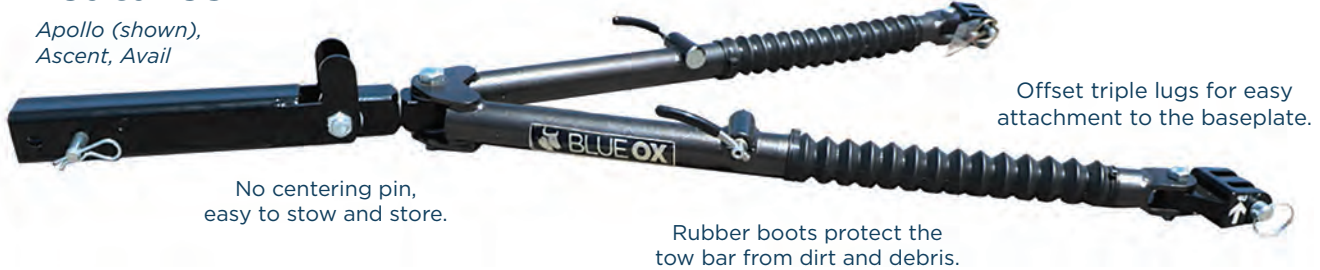
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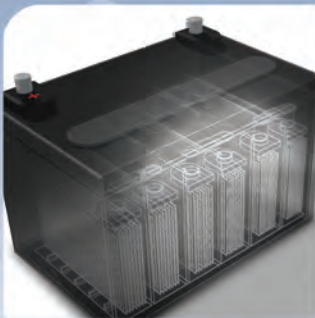
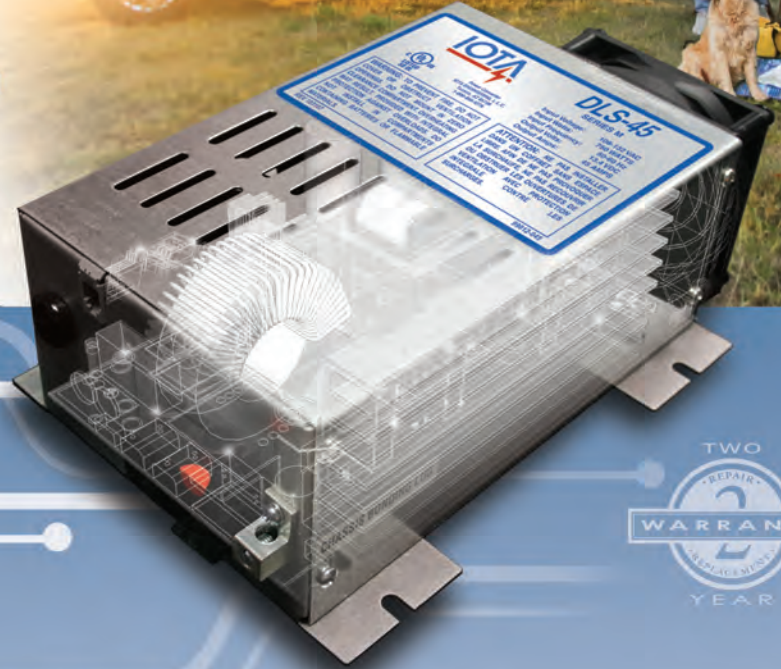
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Cruikshank adds that employees need to be problem-solvers because, with RVs, sometimes the manufacturer is no longer in business, or the company doesn't have specs on something that was built several years ago.

"There's a whole lot of troubleshooting, trying to find things, tracing wires, following pipe through the walls, through the floor until it connects with something important," Cherry says.

Custom Work as a Creative Outlet

The custom work is a creative outlet, according to Cherry.

"Every day, I get to come here and work with massively skilled people," he says. "Everyone here is an artist. This is a massive co-op of artists being able to be creative. We're creating art – and people are paying us to do it. It's not art that you hang on a museum wall – it's fluid, it's got motion and we become a part of it."

"I've built a lot of crazy (stuff)," he adds. "If it's off-the-wall and cool, I want to build it."

For example, a hedge-fund manager in New York had located a 1965 Chevrolet school bus in a field in Kentucky.

"They wanted me to convert the bus for them. They told me money was no object," Cherry says. "I could do anything you want with that bus. ... You want it to hover 15 feet off the ground? I can do that. How much do you want to spend?"

Cherry ended up driving to Kentucky to get the bus. He stretched it, raised the roof, and built it on a Dodge 5500 chassis.

"We kind of duplicated his Learjet interior," he says. "He's using it as a personal limousine in New York City."

Cruikshank, says "every build is different in terms of scope. ... They all represent unique challenges."

"One we're working on right now is a custom build from front to back," he says. The crew is starting with a bus with seats, which it is removing and replacing with 14 computer workstations. He expects the job will take a couple of months.

Cherry says he can't even talk about some of the projects his company has built.

"I've done a lot of crazy (stuff) for a lot of people," he says. "Unfortunately, a lot of people make me sign nondisclosures. I've done work for the government on some crazy stuff, but I don't get to say what it is or who it was for."

A project on the company's website could fall into the "crazy" category: the Global Xplorer, a six-by-six all-wheel-drive off-road motorhome that looks something like a school bus on steroids.

According to the website, the Global Xplorer features a Cummins diesel engine, an Allison automatic transmission, a diesel generator, thermal-imaging cameras, night vision surrounding the vehicle, a central tire-inflation system, custom lighting, and lots of storage. And that's before the interior is even built.

"I'm \$700,000 into it, and I don't even have an interior in it," Cherry says, estimating that the finished price could approach \$1.5 million. "I just kind of went crazy."

Cherry says the thinking behind the Global Xplorer and other off-road RVs is that "life begins where the pavement ends."

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A photo of John Cherry's grandfather, John Serro, the founder of the iconic Serro Scotty teardrop trailers, is pictured on a wall inside of Evolution Custom Coach. The Serro Scotty trailer above is on display at the RV/MH Hall of Fame in Elkhart, Ind.



Evolution Custom Coach is a family-owned and operated business. Pictured here in front of one of their project builds is (left to right): Angie Cherry, Justin Cherry, John Cherry, plus Jason Cruikshank. John Cherry and Cruikshank founded the business in 2002.

Not Your Dad's RV ... Or RV Adventure

"Our parents, when they used the RV, it was to go see the world's biggest ball of yarn or to go see the Grand Canyon," Cherry says. "We're more adventurous and like to go places where dirt bikes and quads can be used, and not be stuck with the RV in the parking lot."

Not everything the company builds is as extreme as the Global Xplorer, though.

"It could start at \$150,000 on up. It's what you want. Isn't that the idea of a custom RV – getting an RV that fits you?" Cherry says. "I can take your average RV and turn it into whatever you want it to be."

Besides an office on wheels and a survival-style RV, Evolution Custom Coach also can build bunk coaches, entertainer coaches, mobile command centers, mobile medical units, mobile showrooms, campaign buses and much more.

Cherry whimsically likens dreaming up, building, and enjoying custom RVs to a something of an addiction.

"This is the greatest thing," he says. "I'm feeding people's addictions (for bigger, better, nicer RVs). They all started out like me: a pup tent, a pop-up, a 13-foot unit, a 15-foot unit. ... This addiction doesn't end. You just keep getting bigger and bigger.

"There's no other business I'd rather do," he says. "The smiles we get to put on people's faces, the children, all the things this business entails. This business entails pleasure, freedom and the American spirit." **RVF**



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Q&A

By Ronnie Wendt

with Northern Wholesale's Chad Smith

The new CEO of Northern Wholesale Supply discusses his goals for growing the distributor amid supply chain challenges facing the industry.



Chad Smith is a relative newcomer to the RV industry, having spent the most recent part of his career at BorgWarner, running its aftermarket parts business for automobiles and medium- to heavy-duty commercial trucks.

But Smith says the similarities between the automotive and the RV industry, as well as his passion for the outdoors, attracted him to the role as CEO of Northern Wholesale Supply, a regional distributor of aftermarket parts and accessories for the RV and marine industries.

Smith describes himself as an active outdoorsman who spent childhood vacations camping and fishing in the upper Midwest. He has long owned a boat and now he owns an RV, too.

He says he sees his closeness to the RV and marine industries personally and professionally as the perfect blend of experience for Northern Wholesale. He says he also saw that Northern Wholesale Supply built its brand on strong customer service and relationships – values he says he also shares.

All these factors aligned for Smith to join the growing company in late July, just seven months after private equity firm Wynnchurch Capital acquired it.

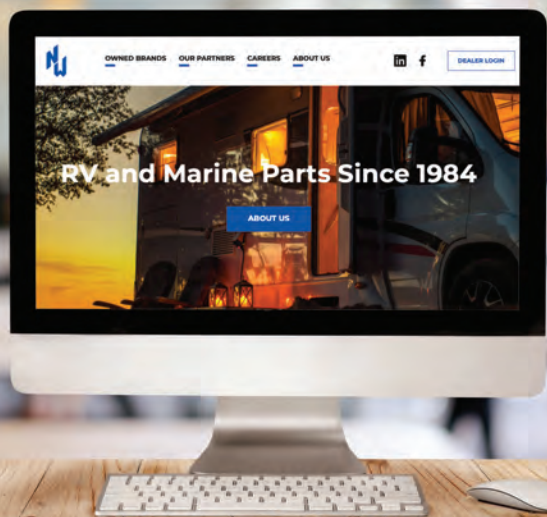
RV PRO recently caught up with Smith to gather his views on what dealers can expect from Northern Wholesale Supply moving forward, how the company has prepared for ongoing supply chain challenges, and his long-term outlook for the RV industry.

RV PRO: What appealed to you about the CEO position with Northern Wholesale?

Smith: I was looking for a cultural fit as much as I wanted to be a part of a business at this stage in its maturity. With private equity investment, Northern Wholesale has a launchpad to expand and add more inventory, warehouses and geography. It is the perfect time for this business to take the next big leap. It is super exciting to be a part of this.

RV PRO: You were hired in July. What have your first months been like?

Smith: I had the benefit of coming into a few big events, which has been fantastic. There was RVIA (Aftermarket Confer-





PHOTOS COURTESY OF NORTHERN WHOLESALE

Members of the Northern Wholesale Supply team pose for a group photo during the distributor's show for marine dealers in September. Smith says that show was a huge success, drawing a good group of dealers who longed for an in-person show.

ence) in Atlanta, where I met a ton of suppliers, distributors, and industry folks.

On the marine side, we had NDMA (National Marine Distributor Association) meetings and our marine show, and I met many customers and vendors there. It's been like drinking from a fire hose.

But the fact that I've gotten to see so much of the market on both the vendor and customer side has been great. I also took my first month and spent half my time in the warehouse working: boxing parts, shipping and receiving. I felt it was important to get that firsthand experience to understand how the business works.

RV PRO: Do you have any specific priorities since you stepped into the position?

Smith: It's no surprise to say managing through a supply chain disruption is my first priority. The supply chain is crazy right now. Components are delayed. Container costs are at an all-time high. Finding labor is challenging. Then throw in COVID-19 and strong consumer demand, and it puts more pressure on the supply chain. A big priority is mitigating that.

We invested in inventory to manage the ups and downs so we can serve our customers. We are using good demand planning and forecasting and are erring on the side of more inventory to weather the storm. We are making sure we have backup supply and are putting systems in place to know exactly what we have and to make sure it's in the right place to get it to customers quickly. We are partnering with customers to understand what demand will



Tony Butler from Walex takes dealers' orders on the show floor in this file photo. Northern Wholesale is expecting more than 400 people and 120 vendors will attend its RV show in December.



Dealers take advantage of an educational seminar during a Northern Wholesale show in this file photo. Northern shows have always offered a variety of educational seminars covering products and best business practices.



We are also investing in inventory so we can service demand – even if a boat gets docked coming from overseas because of a COVID outbreak, the Suez Canal gets blocked, a chip shortage arises, or a plant that makes resin for the entire world catches fire. These things are 100-year events, but we’ve had 10 of them in the past 12 months.



look like and with suppliers to help them plan their production schedules. I walked into a really healthy team. But we’re sourcing people, tools and technology to handle our growth, which has come quickly.

RV PRO: Some in the RV industry may not be familiar with Northern Wholesale. What is the geographic area that you cover and how many customers do you serve?

Smith: We’re based just north of Minneapolis, Minn. We do well in Wisconsin, Iowa, the Dakotas and Minnesota. That’s our core market where our trucks can get to customers within a day.

We also service Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska and Kansas, areas where it’s more of a two-day service. We can parcel anywhere, but our core market is the upper Midwest. We are about 50-50 marine and RV. We also are in modular housing, but that’s a smaller piece of the portfolio on the RV side.

RV PRO: Do you have any plans to expand your territory across the United States?

Smith: Yes! That’s one of the exciting things that attracted me to this business.

In the past, the intent was to grow organically. But having private equity behind us represents all kinds of new opportunities. Part of our strategy is to expand geographically. We can do that organically, but now we have opportunities for acquisition as well. There are a lot of family-run, customer-centric companies that we can partner with to expand.

We’d like to take our service model, our secret sauce – that relationship-driven good service – to customers in both RV and marine and expand that geographically. We think it’s a recipe for success that we can imitate in other parts of the country.

RV PRO: To what extent are your RV and marine customers similar? And to what extent are they different?

Smith: There are some similarities in that they both have a dealer channel. There is also an element of eCommerce. There are eCommerce players and there are dealerships. Some of our suppliers crossover to both and they have marine, outdoor and RV applications.



Dealers gather around the LaSalle Bristol booth to learn about the company’s many offerings in this file photo. A number of suppliers use the Northern Wholesale show to debut new products to the market.

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Pictured above and below is Northern Wholesale's facility in Hugo, Minn. The regional distributor primarily serves RV and marine dealers in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, the Dakotas and other portions of the upper Midwest.



and featured a number of new products and technologies. We have our RV show coming up in December and are expecting over 400 people and 120 vendors. We believe dealers want to get out and see what's new, visit with their peers, and secure orders for next year.

RV PRO: Will Northern Wholesale be doing anything new at its RV show?

Smith: We will continue to build on the success we've had in the past but with a bit more

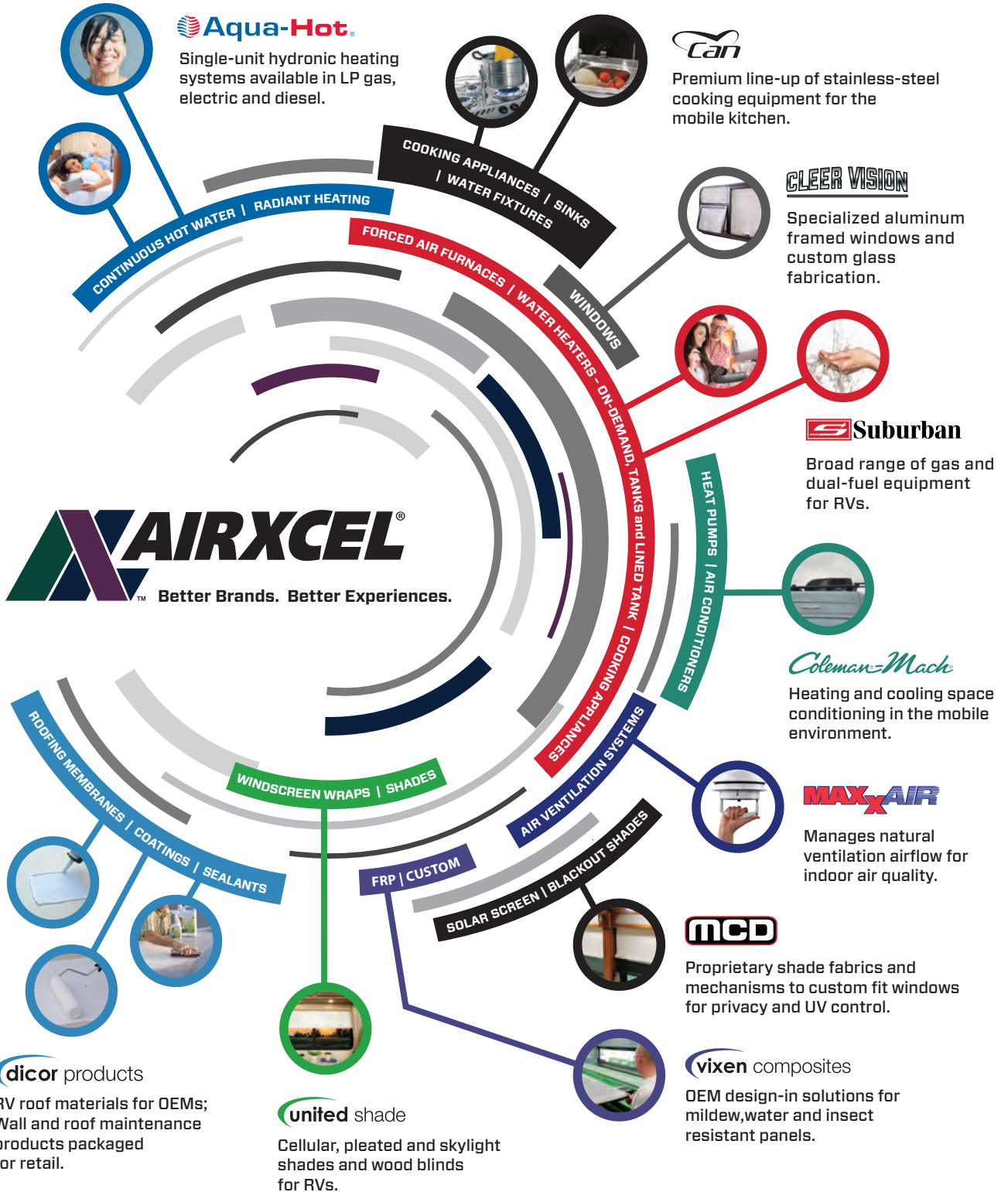
in technology. We've launched an online portal where customers can see what's new before the show, decide what they want to see, schedule meetings and place orders. We had this technology for the last couple of years, but we have continuously improved it. We are opening the online portal a month early so dealers can get a running start before the show.

We got a lot of feedback at the marine show that the show was more informative because they didn't have to run around placing orders during show. We've also added a couple of large screens where

“When supply chains throw you a curveball, you have to react. ... We will get a truck and drive across two states to pick up product so we can get it here quicker. We will even send out someone on a late night run so a dealer has product first thing in the morning.”

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Furrion partnered with Lippert to bring a travel trailer and several booth displays to a previous Northern Wholesale show. Northern's show attracts some of the biggest RV aftermarket suppliers as exhibitors.

vendors can market their products and show training videos. We will also offer a virtual component as long as COVID and safety is a concern. We need to cater to those customers and vendors that are not able to join the show in person.

RV PRO: There has been a lot of talk about supply chain issues in the industry. Can you share Northern Wholesale's coping strategies?

Smith: Coping with supply chain disruptions comes down to a few big buckets. One is communication. Every day, we are talking to customers, industry professionals and suppliers to get feedback on what they're seeing. With high demand and supply chain disruptions, we need to plan better. I lump communication into forecasting and demand planning. We are smarter when we work together. Our dealers see things firsthand. They know how many RVs they're getting in. They know what the aftermarket demand is. They know what the traffic looks like. They know what products are in demand. The more we can communicate with them, the smarter we'll be.

We are also investing in inventory so we can weather unexpected delays and service demand. This has been especially important over the last year where we have seen blank sailings, canals blocked, chip shortages, natural disasters and labor shortages. We recognize the best way we can win business and keep the market moving is to do everything we can to have product available.

When supply chains throw you a curve ball, you have to react. We're paying premiums for containers overseas and expediting domestic shipments. We will get in a truck and drive across town to pick up product so we can get it to a customer in need. We will even send out someone on a late night run so a dealer has product first thing in the morning. Do the extraordinary in the spirit of customer service. You may not be able to do that 100 percent of the time, but these aren't normal times. So, go out of your way to service the customer because it's the right thing to do.

RV PRO: Do you have any sense of when supply chain issues might be resolved?


Smith: That's the trillion-dollar question. To be honest, six months ago, I would have said that things should normalize by the end of the year. Now I think we will see some supply chain challenges well into 2023. The real answer depends on recovery in a number of areas, including labor shortages, container capacity, chip production and trade agreements. Recovery also depends on consumer demand for RVs and accessory products. I hope to see strong demand continue in our markets, as people continue to enjoy the outdoors and spending time with friends and family. The pandemic opened people's eyes to a new way of living. Maybe we won't see the boom we saw in late 2020 and throughout 2021, but it will reach a new plateau where people spend more time and money

outdoors than before the pandemic.

RV PRO: In 2019, Northern Wholesale beat out several larger distributors to be recognized as Distributor of the Year at the RVIA Aftermarket Conference. That was prior to your arrival, but do you have any thoughts as to what contributed to Northern receiving that award?

Smith: Our culture, the relationships we have with dealers and manufacturers, our exemplary service and our reputation for being a trustworthy and a dependable partner contributed to this award. Our culture is one of the best I've seen in my career in regard to customer service and accountability. Our team will always go out of their way to do the right thing for customers. Relationships and dependability go a long way to earn and maintain trust and loyalty. When a business becomes more transactional, and forgets relationships, it becomes cold and rigid. But everybody here knows what pays the bills, and that's people enjoying the outdoors and having the parts, repairs, and new toys they need. We are a critical part of that process, and we will continue to operate with this as our driver.

RV PRO: Are there specific short- or medium-term goals for Northern moving forward? And if so, what are they?

Smith: There are a few strategic priorities for us right now. One is to continue to provide world-class service for our customers. We are doing this with increased inventory levels, communication and demand planning tools. Next is expansion. We strive to service an expanded geography with more products, getting closer to customers to serve them better. Finally, we plan to invest in new tools and processes to service our growth. This includes investments in automation, demand planning, marketing, digitization and training. As we mentioned before, this is an exciting time to be in the RV market, and an exciting time to be at Northern Wholesale Supply! 



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Tri-Lynx Levels Up

By Maura Keller

The manufacturer of the ubiquitous orange leveling blocks continues to build on its success with an array of new aftermarket products.

In most RV campgrounds today it's common to see a myriad of RVs being leveled using pieces of wood, big stones or other things that can be found around the campsite. While these objects may "do the job" of leveling an RV in a pinch, they are far from perfect and, in some cases, are actually dangerous.

Enter Tri-Lynx Corp. Co-founded in 1992 by Reg Funk, Tri-Lynx specializes in RV leveling blocks and related accessories.

As Lance Colak, director of marketing for Tri-Lynx explains, the key reason for the company's founding came down to the realization that there was a need for a product to level RVs without having to rely on stones, planks of wood and other jerry-rigged items.



Lance Colak, director of marketing for Tri-Lynx Corp., is surrounded by the company's many products at the company's offices. Products produced by Tri-Lynx include a variety of leveling and stabilizing products, and other accessories.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TRI-LYNX CORP.

Founded in 1992, Tri-Lynx has become the standard for RV leveling. The company has grown greatly and expanded its product offerings over the years.



“To be honest, those are still some of our biggest competitors – planks of wood and other things that RV owners use for leveling,” says Colak.

Considered to be the “first of its kind,” nearly 30 years ago, Tri-Lynx was the original RV leveling block on the market, according to Colak. The brightly colored iridescent orange blocks – which are considered the company’s signature mark – made their debut with Coast Distribution.

Within a short period of time, Tri-Lynx became a core product within the RV stabilization category – thanks in part to Funk’s presence on the trade show circuit and his efforts to directly connect with as many RV aficionados as possible, according to Colak. Funk’s marketing efforts significantly impacted Tri-Lynx’s presence in the marketplace and helped put the company on the proverbial map, he adds.

With 17 years under his belt at Tri-Lynx, Colak says he was profoundly influenced by Funk, who passed away unexpectedly in 2019. Currently, Colak runs the day-to-day operations and handles the company’s ever-growing marketing opportunities.



Tri-Lynx’s distinctive orange leveling blocks are used by RVers in campgrounds across North America. They provide a much more reliable solution for leveling than using items found around campground, such as stones or wood.



“We’ve worked in the same category for pretty much our entire company history.”

– Lance Colak, director of marketing for Tri-Lynx Corp.



Tri-Lynx leveling blocks come in distinctive blue carrying bags that lend themselves to easy merchandising.

Company’s Success Built on Levelers

The manufacturing of Tri-Lynx leveling products takes place in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. And while Tri-Lynx’s product line has expanded over the years to include such things as the Lynx Stay-Put Hanger and the Lynx Work Rite Lite, the company’s core focus continues to be on levelers and stabilizers.

“We’ve worked in the same category for pretty much our entire company history,” Colak says. “A typical product lifecycle is about seven years before it’s retired, but our product has grown for 29 years. We still continue to see record growth – and it’s because our products last a long time. In fact, the strength of the science of our products has shown over time. In addition, people love our brand. And they love the color. It stands out and is easily recognizable.”

Indeed, visitors to campgrounds today are bound to see the iridescent orange Tri-Lynx levelers underneath a variety of travel trailers as well as many motorhomes, thanks to the levelers’ ability to hold enormous amounts of weight, up to 40,000 pounds.

In addition to consumers being drawn to Tri-Lynx being made in America, the longevity of the product’s quality speaks volumes to Colak and his team.

“We get calls from people who still have the original product that they purchased 20 years ago. Being made in America, with American engineering and design, speaks volumes. That’s not knocking items that are made overseas – it’s just that there’s a level of quality that comes with products being made in America,” Colak says. “Not everyone can say that.”

To stress that aspect of the Tri-Lynx brand, Colak recently changed the company’s product descriptor from “Made in the U.S.A.” to “Always Made in the U.S.A.” specifically for the company’s leveling products.



Pictured here is a closeup of Tri-Lynx's Chock 'R Dock product, which the company says works well as a wheel chock, with the added benefit of being an easy-to-use tongue dock.



This particular dealership found a particularly creative way to promote Tri-Lynx's leveling blocks.

In addition to the being proud of the "Made in the U.S.A" label, Colak also is extremely happy with the number of positive reviews the company continually receives online.

"The reviews say a lot about the long-term viability of the product and that consumers are buying our leveling systems more or less for life," he says.

The Tri-Lynx products come with a 10-year warranty, which adds to the consumer confidence level of their products, according to Colak. He says the Tri-Lynx team determined the 10-year warranty was apropos after reviewing the data, including the number of annual returns the company receives each year.

"We aren't saying we are perfect, but with the 10-year warranty, it is one of the key factors why many consumers are choosing our products over our competitors," he adds.

Leveling Blocks Simple to Use

The core facet of the Tri-Lynx leveling blocks and leveling systems is simplicity.

"The interlocking design means that the first block is an inch-and-a-half high, the second layer becomes 2.5 inches, and it can go up from there," Colak says. "We don't recommend going more than 5 inches high, as you don't want to be off the ground. If you are more than 5 inches, you should probably find a better spot."

For retailers working with consumers interested in Tri-Lynx, the 10-pack is the company's bread-and-butter product. Lynx

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A World of Comfort



Tri-Lynx is a regular exhibitor at RV trade shows and consumer events. The company attributes its success thanks to its presence on the trade show circuit and Funk's early efforts to directly connect with as many RV aficionados as possible.

Levelers 10 Pack include a set of interlocking plastic blocks that configure to fit any leveling function and withstand significant weight. The 10 Lynx Levelers come with a heavy-duty blue nylon storage case.


Although the Lynx Levelers 10 Pack is the company's best-selling product, the Lynx Stop N' Chock is not far behind. As Colak explains, this product was introduced in 2002 to enable people to use the chock to indicate the point that they need to stop.

"This product allows people – especially those who are by themselves – to level their vehicles or trailer on their own," he says. "We are also seeing a significant increase in sales on our Lynx Chock 'R Dock product, which is exciting."


Ideal for customers looking for stability and leveling for marine, personal watercraft, all-terrain-vehicles, as well as street and sport motorcycles, the Lynx Chock 'R Dock works well as a chock, with the added benefit of being an easy-to-use tongue dock, according to Colak. It also can be used on any size rig and it is completely

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compatible with all of Lynx' other leveling products, he says.

Meanwhile, Colak is eager to introduce the company's newest product: The Lynx Boat trailer pack, which is ideal for consumers looking to secure their boat and get it off the ground. The boat trailer pack includes four Lynx levelers and two Chock 'R Dock, one of which goes under the wheel and the other one goes under the trailer hitch.

"This past year, the RV industry has become so popular as people are finding new, safer alternatives to travel. Because of this momentum, we came up with different combination packs of our levelers to make it easier for RV dealers," Colak says. "Each combination pack is housed in the Lynx Blue Bag, which itself has become a favorite among RV customers who love the durability of the bag. In fact, it's become so popular that we now sell the bag on its own, as many customers want to use the extra bags for storage of other travel items."

Reaching Customers Through Social Media

In today's highly competitive marketplace, companies are vying for consumers' attention by expanding their community outreach. To achieve this, many are turning to social media platforms to connect with potential consumers – and Tri-Lynx is no exception.


"There is such a versatile mix of people who have a need for and interest in our product – from small travel trailers to RVs to food trucks to expedition trucks that go off-roading," Colak says. To further gauge interest in its products, Tri-Lynx introduced a social media marketing technique across the company's social media presence called, "Lynx in the Wild." Customers can post various picturesque photos of their recreational vehicles using Tri-Lynx products.

"Some of these images look like we've hired a professional photographer to go to a beach or a mountain to shoot our products," Colak says.

One unique potential customer opportunity for Tri-Lynx falls within the food truck industry. That's because many appliances, including stoves and refrigerators, can stop working if they are off-level.

"I had a neighbor who was a brand new RVer, and she went out with her RV and found that the refrigerator wouldn't work within the RV, so I gave them some Tri-Lynx blocks to stabilize it and she leveled it off and everything began working again," Colak says. "These are real-life, practical examples of what our product can do."

In addition to using social media to connect with customers, Tri-Lynx also features a unique blog on the company website. The blog focuses on all aspects of RV travel including innovative camper transformations, eco-friendly RV ideas and even how to host a Christmas dinner in an RV.

"At the end of the day, we just hope visitors read the blog and get some knowledge about traveling in an RV or with a travel trailer and then they are reminded of us," Colak says. "There are only so many ways you can talk about leveling, so it is fun to incorporate different content into our blog that shows all facets of the industry and different topics and areas that are just fun and unique." 



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REMOTE-ENABLED RV LEVELING SYSTEM

EQ Systems, Elkhart, Ind., presents the EQ Smart-Level, which is designed to change the way RV leveling is done. With a convenient Bluetooth app, RV owners can operate their leveling system using their smartphone or tablet from anywhere within Bluetooth range, with or without a multiplex system. EQ Smart-Level has a control panel that also integrates the level sensor, making OEM and aftermarket installations much simpler. EQ Smart-Level is available for most RVs, including Class B+, Class C, Class A, diesel and fifth wheel.

www.eqsystems.us

RV LEVELING BLOCKS

Valterra, Mission Hills, Calif., offers its Valterra Stackers. RVers can handle their leveling needs with a single, four pack, 10 pack, and a chock. The product can be positioned with the EZ grip handle and interlocking pieces, and it can be used under scissor, hydraulic, fifth wheel or stabilizer jacks. The product is safe for up to 40,000 pounds gross vehicle weight.

www.valterra.com





SCISSOR JACK

BAL RV Products, Elkhart, Ind., presents its LoPro SJ24 Scissors Jack, suitable for all types of trailers and campers. Slim storage design helps with installation on low-profile trailers such as tent campers or teardrops. A superior E-Coat finish with double-lead acme thread provides quicker operation. The LoPro SJ24 features 5,000 pounds of static capacity per jack. The kit includes two scissor jacks, one crank handle and mounting hardware. The LoPro SJ24 is made in the U.S.A.

www.balrvproducts.com



DRIVE-ON LEVELERS

Camco Mfg., Greensboro, N.C., introduces the Curved Leveler – a simple way to level a vehicle by giving a tire up to 4 extra inches of lift. The honeycomb design makes the leveler lightweight but durable. The drive-on curved design allows RVers to only drive on to as much height as needed, then chock the leveler at the exact right height. The included chock has non-slip rubber grippers on the bottom. They are designed for use with trailers up to 30,000 pounds.

www.camco.net

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Stromberg Carlson, Traverse City, Mich., offers its JET-4500 Electric Tongue Jack. The product has a 4,500-pound capacity with a ball-screw mechanism. It has a 9.5" to 32" vertical range from ground to center of the mounting plate and 18 inches of travel with an additional 4.5" drop-down leg. The jack includes three separate LED lights, a built-in level, and weighs 30 pounds. It also has a removable 5.5"-diameter footpad. The product comes with a limited two-year warranty.

www.strombergcarlson.com



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www.lci1.com



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<http://huskytow.com>



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Origen RV Accessories, Calgary, Alberta, offers its RV SnapPads. RVers can protect asphalt from cracks, their jacks from the elements, and avoid having to crawl under their rigs. The product is made from recycled rubber tires and is available in a variety of shapes and sizes.

<https://rvsnappad.com>



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Air Lift Co., Lansing, Mich., offers its LoadLifter 5000 air suspension kits. The product fits many 1/2-, 3/4-, and 1-ton pickups. The air springs are designed to boost safety and comfort when towing RVs.

www.airliftcompany.com



MOVABLE JACK MOUNT

Jack-E-Up, Echo, Ore., offers its Jack-E-Up jack remover. The company says that the product can prevent bent jacks, dented tailgates, and that RVers can move their trailer jacks out of the way with 1/6th of a turn.

www.jack-e-up.com



AUTOMATIC JACK FOOT

Fastway Trailer Products, Provo, Utah, offers its FLIP Automatic Jack Foot, which can extend RVers' trailer jacks by 4" to 6". The product is designed to save RVers time and effort and there's no need for woodblocks or rocks because the FLIP has two times the contact surface area.

www.fastwaytrailer.com



PIPE-MOUNT SWIVEL JACK

CURT, Eau Claire, Wis., offers the CURT pipe mount swivel jack (#28354) to promote quick setup of a trailer with its easy-to-use swivel bracket. It folds up and out of the way whenever needed and has a travel height of 10". This jack also features a capacity of 5,000 pounds. With a foot plate on the bottom, it also provides stability for the trailer. It comes with a side-wind handle for ergonomic operation and includes a weldable pipe mount for secure installation.

www.curtmfg.com

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www.bulldogproducts.net

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RV Intelligence, Longwood, Fla., offers the WoBLER as an evolution in leveling RVs. The easy-to-use smartphone app shows a 2-D bubble level image to assist in leveling an RV. The level-sensing module is compact and simple to install. The Hitch Point mode allows for exact hitch height every time. The WoBLER can be mounted anywhere in the RV and uses the RVIQWoBLR app. The WoBLER has a 100' (33-meter) range and is accurate to within 1 degree.

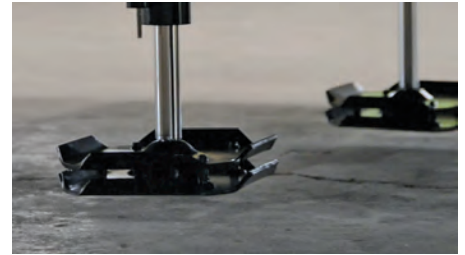
www.rv-intelligence.com



HEAVY-DUTY RV LEVELING SYSTEM

Hopkins Manufacturing, Emporia, Kan., offers its Endurance Leveling System. The product combines wood and reinforced plastic to help RVers keep their RVs level. It also has a non-skid traction mat to help prevent slipping while in use, and it can double as a carrying strap to and from the RV. The product also has an integrated wheel dock and chock.

www.hopkinstowingsolutions.com



WELD-FREE LEVELING SYSTEM

Quadra Mfg., White Pigeon, Mich., presents the Bigfoot “Bolt-On” Leveling American-made, hydraulic leveling systems that require zero welding to install for Class C motorhomes built on the Ford Transit, Ford E-450 and Mercedes Sprinter 3500 chassis. It features one-touch fully automatic leveling, one-touch auto-retract, audible safety alarm, all up indication, emergency retract feature and more.

www.bigfootleveler.com

www.marshallexcelsior.com/rvandcampingequipment

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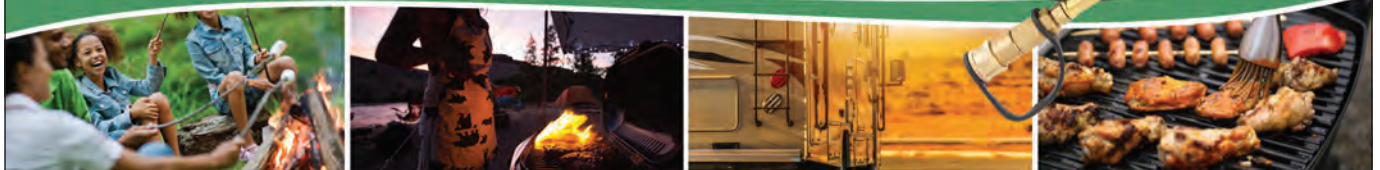




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www.torklift.com



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Ultra-Fab Products, Elkhart, Ind., features a full line of Tongue Jacks for every RV need. Ultra-Fab Tongue Jacks go through rigorous independent laboratory testing that allows the company to offer an upgraded five-year warranty on Ultra series Jacks and the Phoenix series has the industry's best upgraded 10-year warranty, if activated online within 90 days of purchase. Dealers: Purchase three different Ultra-Fab Tongue Jacks and receive the display stand free (stand only, does not include jacks).

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www.trilynx.com

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Meyer Distributing, Jasper, Ind., offers the Ultra Series 3500 electric tongue jack. The product has a 3,500-pound capacity.

www.meyerdistributing.com

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www.barkermfg.com

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www.roadmasterinc.com



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www.logicbluetech.com

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Dicor on Top of the RV Industry

By K. Schipper

The supplier of roofing products to OEMs and the aftermarket continues to innovate on both sides of the market and sees strong growth prospects moving forward.

In a year that has seen several “big” breaking news stories in the RV industry, perhaps none has been bigger than THOR’s acquisition this summer of supplier Airxcel.

The \$750 million deal, which closed Sept. 1, may have left some who do business with Airxcel’s 10-plus brands that supply everything in RVs from air conditioners and heaters to window shades and more wondering what the next step is for the 30-year-old company.

However, executives for one of those key brands, Dicor Products, say that, if anything, the move should lend more stability and widen opportunities for the well-known provider of RV roofing solutions for OEMs and the aftermarket.

“It will be business as usual,” says Anthony Wollschlager, group president of Airxcel’s RV Group. “Prior to THOR acquiring Airxcel,

we were in a private equity environment for our 30-plus-year history. THOR has a decentralized model, and it’s our responsibility to go out and earn our business every single day – just like we have for the last 30-plus years.”

Troy Nusbaum, vice president of OEM sales for Airxcel’s RV Group, praised the company’s previous private equity partners – there have been five of them over the life of Airxcel – for being good sponsors and stewards of its myriad businesses.

“However, it’s a unique situation now with our new parent owner,” Nusbaum adds. “They are looking for a more long-term commitment and they’re just as vested in this industry as we are.”

Still, there are some changes. One of the key ones came early this summer, when Wollschlager, who had been serving as Dicor



From left to right, Dicor executives Jeff Gaff, Troy Nusbaum and Anthony Wollschlager are pictured at the company’s offices in Elkhart, Ind., in front of signage for parent company Airxcel and its 10-plus brands, including Dicor. Gaff serves as business unit manager of Dicor Products, Nusbaum is vice president of OEM sales for Airxcel’s RV Group and Wollschlager is group president of Airxcel’s RV Group.

PHOTOS BY STEVE TOEPP / MIDWEST PHOTOGRAPHICS



Dicor's massive warehouse operation in Elkhart serves many nearby OEMs as well as others across the country. Dicor provides a variety of roofing options for RV makers, including BriteTEK TPO, DiFlex III TPO, and Tufflex PVC.

Corp. president, was promoted to group president, expanding his responsibility for Dicor Products, United Shade, Vixen Composites, and MCD to include both OEM and aftermarket sales and marketing for Clear Vision Tempered Glass and Clear Vision Windows. He also leads all OEM and aftermarket sales and marketing.

"My role has changed a little bit, but not necessarily from what I was doing prior," Wollschlager says. "I have a little bit more responsibility, but my day-to-day functions remain the same, and we've done a small reorganization where Marc Brunner, our former vice president of operations, has taken over as general manager. And he'll be supported by Jeff Gaff, who is business unit manager of Dicor Products."

Gaff says that, for his part, the goal remains to keep Dicor Products as the leading supplier of RV roofing materials. Both he and Wollschlager say what sets Dicor apart from its competition is its depth and variety of offerings.

"To the OEMs, we offer five different types of roof membrane, multiple types of sealants and a full array of colors," says Gaff. "The same is true in the aftermarket. Some of them are offshoots of roofing: cap sealants, cleaners, conditioners and tape. It's just a broader line than what's being offered elsewhere."

The company first made its mark in the industry offering EPDM (ethylene propylene diene monomer) rubber. Dicor was among the first to bring EPDM to the market in lighter shades, and it is still selling the old standby, mainly in the aftermarket.

For years, its main competitor was TPO (thermoplastic olefin, or polyolefin), which came out of the automotive industry.



"During the pandemic, we never stopped what we were doing in terms of product development and trying to increase customer satisfaction. We remained true to our DNA during that period – and we still are."

– Anthony Wollschlager, group president of Airxcel's RV Group



Dicor created a whole consumer education plan on its website around "Rudy, The Dicor Products Answer Man" including how-to RV cleaning videos. Dicor had bobble heads made of Rudy that it gives out at RV shows.



Pictured here is a rotating carousel that holds a variety of Dicor roofing materials, which are used for the company's roof kitting process for the aftermarket. The roof kits only receive a certain square footage per kit, so having the large roofing rolls on a system like this allows the kitters to roll out so much and easily cut it down to size.

"To the OEMs, we offer five different types of roof membrane, multiple types of sealants and a full array of colors."

– Jeff Gaff, business unit manager of Dicor Products

History of Innovation

There, the story might have ended, except that Dicor is not a company to rest on its laurels. Today's RV roofs are, as Gaff puts it, "all TPO and PVC," and the company's own offerings include BriteTEK TPO, DiFlex III TPO, and Tufflex PVC, each with specific advantages.

BriteTEK, for instance, is a fleece-backed TPO designed specifically for the RV industry. DiFlex III comes in five distinct colors, and with the flexibility of EPDM, it's easy to install. Polar White DiFlex III TPO offers similar advantages, but its high reflectivity is designed to keep RV roofs cool. And Tufflex PVC is highly flexible and puncture- and tear-resistant.

The reason the products are evolving, both Wollschlager and Nusbaum say, is because the things RV consumers are looking for in a roof are changing.

"A lot of these folks want their RV to offer all the creature comforts of home," says Nusbaum. "They aren't necessarily using them just for recreational purposes, which is why you're seeing more square footage on RVs and fifth wheels. The folks in our air conditioning division say they're putting on more ACs per coach than they ever have before."

He adds that's part of the attraction of both the Polar White DiFlex and the white Tufflex products, which have been recognized by the Cool Roof Rating Council (CRRC). Polar White DiFlex also has Energy Star certification.

"Both are third-party tested and keep a coach cooler than anything else on the market," says Nusbaum. "It's almost a defense mechanism against the heat."

Wollschlager notes that innovation is part of the DNA of all Airxcel brands, which is why Dicor is on its third generation of TPO products and has introduced more new roofing systems in the past five years than it did in the previous 25. He agrees



Dicor makes a variety of aftermarket products to allow RVers to protect their RV roofs, including cleaners and protectants.

that new RV consumers also come with new expectations.

“We’re taking that information and then spreading it across our product development teams as we deliver on new products,” says Wollschlager. “We’re continually looking at how we improve roofing systems, both for the end consumer and for our OEM customers.”

Fortunately, he says, they are looking for many of the same characteristics.

“They have to be cognizant of how the product installs,” Wollschlager says. “They’re concerned about the ease of installation and how comfortable they are with the adhesion level between the decking and the membrane itself. And they’re concerned about the cosmetic attributes of our sealant package as they start to seal around accessories on the roof. It’s what’s important to them based on the applications we have, and that’s where we remain focused.”

When it comes to the roofing system, the goal of all OEMs – whether they’re building small towables or large Class A units – is to protect the owners of those units and their property. Still, Nusbaum says the needs of those different manufacturers aren’t entirely the same.

“Whether they’re building smaller towables or fifth wheels, there seem to be more complex curves, which makes a membrane roof a little bit more feasible than on a Class A, where it’s pretty much rigid,” Nusbaum observes. “When you get into towables, membrane still seems to be the preferable way to blanket over and cover them up.”

A Committed Partner

Having the best product for each application is important to Dicor, and it comes to product development from at least three different angles. One is simply talking to RV buyers.

“A lot of what we provide is based on customer feedback,” Wollschlager says. “We have our ear to the ground listening to what our customers are telling us, regardless of the market segment.”

However, Dicor also has another exceptional source for what’s happening with technology in the roofing industry.

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Marc Brunner, general manager at Dicor and Vixen Composites, is shown in front of company signage in Elkhart. Elkhart is home to both Dicor and Vixen, which makes custom composite panels and fiberglass-reinforced plastics for the RV industry.



“We tap into some major commercial roofing giants as part of our product development process,” Wollschlager explains. “There are trends happening outside the RV market in membrane-type roofing systems, and we make sure we’re staying in tune with those.”

That’s not a one-way street, though.

“We may provide them with some direction on what the customers are looking for with a new feel, or what they need from us in terms of installation,” says Gaff. “We point them down the road, they come back to us with samples, and we’ll do some internal testing. Then, if it fits our mold, we’ll send everything out for validation to third-party testing.”

Wollschlager stresses that Dicor has engineers on staff, an internal lab, and a chemist, to make sure systems are developed in what he calls, “the best way.”

“We’re a data-driven company,” Wollschlager says. “We want to make sure the data tells us the result; we’re not making assumptions on our own.”

Getting a top-rated product isn’t Dicor’s only goal, however. Providing good service to its OEM customers is also critical.

“From a supply chain standpoint, being a committed partner is one of Airxcel’s pillars,” says Wollschlager. “It’s our responsibility to have the product on-hand when our customers want it.”

He adds, “Whether it’s adding resources, whether it’s expediting material, whether it’s over-communication or finding alternate sources – all those things are within our toolkit to ensure our customers have product when they need it.”

And, once those products are on-hand, Nusbaum says Dicor makes sure they’re being installed correctly.

“Our account representatives are product experts,” Nusbaum says. “When they call on an OEM customer, they’re only there to work with roofing. They don’t have the distraction of 17 other products they have to worry about; they are RV roofing-focused.”

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Portable surge protector kits contain a separate receptacle tester to detect wiring faults at the pedestal and surge module to attach to the detachable power cord. Separating the two functions reduces the size of the product while increasing protection from inclement weather.



Growing Its Aftermarket Presence

Still, Dicor isn't satisfied just to sell to the OEM market. The company has a reputation for working well in the aftermarket, and recent months have seen it expand its product mix in that direction.

Wollschlager notes that while the company's product portfolio has been heavily dominated by roofing, it's been expanding for the past five years.

"For instance, we've expanded recently into cap sealants," he says. "We've also done some kits for window replacement and trim replacement, so we'd like to think we've organically expanded past the roof. And, as we've done that, we've seen opportunities to expand even further."

Much of that has come with encouragement from not only dealers, but representatives in the field and even Dicor's two-step distribution partners, as well as the retail public. But then, the company supports allowing DIYers to do their own thing.

"It comes back to the comfort level of the person who owns the unit," says Wollschlager. "Ultimately, we want to make sure they have a good experience if they choose to do those things."

To help make sure that happens, Dicor also is expanding on its educational materials and providing internal resources for retail customers who have questions.

One retail product that is directly aimed at owners in the company's new "Rudy's RV Care Line," which debuted back in February and offers both cleaning products and equipment to keep RVs of all sorts sparkling "from roofline to wheels," and has been very well-received, according to Wollschlager.

"We're seeing a significant growth in store sets at the dealer level," he says. "We're already seeing replacement orders coming in for material, which is an indication that it's being well-received in the marketplace."

Not surprisingly, the folks at Dicor are bullish on the industry. Wollschlager notes that during the early days of the pandemic, some of its OEM customers went through a down period. However, the aftermarket remained strong, and the OEM side of the business has come roaring back – something he expects to continue for the near future.

That's not to say the executives there are wearing rose-colored glasses, though. Nusbaum points to the threat of inflation and uncertainty in the overall economy.

"Sure, we're going to face challenges," Nusbaum says. "On the other side of the spectrum, we have a higher demand for our products and our lifestyle than we have ever had in the history of this industry. We're gaining new customers every day, and COVID and its restrictions are doing that, and it's been a boon to our industry."

In the meantime, Wollschlager says Dicor will continue to furnish topnotch products and service to the RV industry – much the way it has now for 30-plus years.

"During the pandemic, we never stopped what we were doing in terms of product development and trying to increase customer satisfaction," he says. "We remained true to our DNA during that period – and we still are. Every day, we wake up thinking about what's next." **RV**

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RV PRO

Best New Model

2022

*By Darian Armer, Steve Bibler,
Mike Harbour and RV PRO staff*

RV PRO's take on the best RVs for the coming year.

Alas, this year's Elkhart Open House Week was not meant to be.

With the COVID-19 pandemic still not contained, out of an abundance of caution, the major RV manufacturers decided to cancel formal, large-scale dealer gatherings. That meant the opportunity to tour a multitude of new models on the grounds of the RV/MH Hall of Fame, at Forest River's East to West factory and at several other locations in-between, was not possible.

Fortunately, representatives for all of the OEMs were more than happy to speak with *RV PRO* team members about their latest models, offering valuable insights about what vehicle types, floorplan configurations and product features are likely to be popular in the new year.

As *RV PRO* team members reviewed the multitude of suggested offerings for Best of 2022 RVs, the task of narrowing the list to select winners was as challenging as any "normal" year.

What follows is admittedly subjective. The goal of *RV PRO's* editorial team was to represent a wide spectrum of RVs, with the criteria of highlighting what was new and unique, and with an emphasis on innovation, smart floorplan designs, user-friendly features and quality.



KZ Sportsmen Anniversary Edition

KZ RV is commemorating its founding in 1972 with a special 50th anniversary edition Sportsmen travel trailer for model year 2022.

The anniversary edition features a modern farmhouse interior with white upper cabinets and dark lower cabinets throughout the coach, a wood plank vinyl ceiling, a climate package with enclosed and heated underbelly, and an RV airflow system that the company says improves airflow by 40 percent. The company is touting its 50th anniversary with graphic on the coach's exterior.

"The modern farmhouse interior combines modern-day design fundamentals like light and dark cabinetry with a cozy country home aesthetic, creating a uniquely fresh take on relaxing RV living," says Marlene Snyder, vice president of sales and marketing.

The cabinet combinations are being featured for the first time on a KZ brand.

"We decided to go with the two-tone colors to keep our product fresh and up to date," adds Nick Francis, product manager.

"The 50th anniversary package has gone over extremely well. It works very well with all buyers across the industry," Francis says.

The special features of the anniversary edition are being offered on all Sportsmen 2022 floorplans.

An off-grid solar package, which includes a 100-watt solar panel on the roof with controller and 1,200-watt inverter, is available as an option.

With the cancellation of the Elkhart Open House Week, the new models have been shown only to the current dealer base. Wider exposure began in late September with a display at the KZ facility in Shipshewana, Ind.

The anniversary edition dovetails nicely with a recent consolidation within the flagship Sportsmen lineup. To speed up the order filling process for the top-selling floor-



plans in today's hectic market, KZ opted to consolidate its SE and LE lines into just the SE line starting at model changeover in July.

"We took the most popular features from the LE lineup, such as the enclosed underbelly and outside shower, and moved them into the SE which dealers were asking for," explains Francis. This reduced the number of floorplans from 23 to 16.

At the time of the interview for this story, the MSRP's on new Sportsmen trailers ranged from \$26,800 to \$42,700.

Dealer response to KZ's changes has been "incredible," Francis says. "People love it. The new changes we did this year are going over very well. They're turning as soon as they hit the dealers' lots. We couldn't have asked for much more than that."

What impressed RV PRO: KZ's 50th anniversary Sportsmen edition features many bells and whistles that buyers would not expect in an entry-level stick-and-tin coach. The Sportsmen – one of North America's oldest, continuously manufactured stick-and-tin travel trailers – continues to evolve to meet dealer and consumer needs.



Keystone Arcadia 370RL

RV manufacturers routinely use words like “game changer” to reflect a new model’s anticipated impact in the marketplace. However, in the case of Keystone RV’s new Arcadia 370RL luxury travel trailer, one can make the case the term is appropriate.

The Arcadia is built on the NGC2 chassis, which features a crawl-space design with a 3-inch-tall, insulated channel running the length of the frame. It houses plumbing, electrical and heating ducts. Keystone holds the patent on the NGC2 chassis, which President Jeff Runels predicts will become an industry staple in the coming years.

“We’ve never done a chassis from the ground up at Keystone, so we designed this one very specifically,” he adds. “In most other RV production, the utilities run through cross members. In the Arcadia, we run them through the crawl space. This arrangement guarantees that crucial components won’t chafe on bare metal during production or while in use. This process takes more time to build and is more expensive, but it yields a more residential coach.”

That residential feel – making the travel trailer look and feel like a mid-profile fifth wheel – was a primary goal for the Keystone team, according to Runels.

The Arcadia is chock full of other unique features inside and out. On the outside, Keystone introduced a more aerodynamic look for a travel trailer by designing a forward-leaning front cap, somewhat reminiscent of a fifth wheel. Inside of the unique cap, the forward lean creates more hanging space in the bedroom clothes closet. The entire exterior, except for the roof, is laminated, including the slide-outs.

“We did a ton of research for the inside. We wanted it to be brighter and airier. With this new brand we wanted something to be different, so

we chose white cabinetry throughout with warm accent colors,” Runels says. He adds, “We didn’t want it to look like an RV. We wanted it to look like their home.”

The kitchen island features a large, full-length butcher block flip-up table mounted to the face of the island, which functions as a kitchen sideboard or desk and workstation, with outlets conveniently placed in the island.

Other notable interior touches include a true California king bed and, in the rear lounge, a 92-inch-wide sofa, which Runels says is the largest available to the industry. Meanwhile, Keystone has replaced industry standard but hard-to-clean day/night window shades with Roman shade window coverings, which add privacy and insulation value.

Another bonus: Engineers coaxed an additional 3.5 to 4 inches of head room in the slide box compared with other trailers, adding to the airy, residential feel.

Runels says dealers are most intrigued by the new chassis, although it may be somewhat less appealing to retail customers because most won’t see the utilitarian inner workings. Meanwhile, the unique front cap, because it is so visible, seems to be most appealing to consumers, as is the overall interior décor, according to Runels.

MSRPs on the Arcadia travel trailer range from \$45,000 to \$65,000, depending upon options and floorplans.

What impressed *RV PRO*: The Arcadia’s NGC2 chassis seems poised to radically change the way towables are built, giving them a much more residential feel. The interior color selection and the many residential features throughout the coach make this RV particularly appealing.

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Starcraft Super Lite Maxx 19MBH

Starcraft RV is “striking while the iron is hot” and filling a gap in its lineup with a new lightweight, laminated travel trailer. The manufacturer’s Super Lite Maxx debuted this October, spotlighting four floorplans that offer campers a unit capable for on- and off-grid adventures. Devised as a couple’s coach with an entry-level price tag, the line’s 19MBH floorplan has features that families will also take kindly to.

“We have the single-axle stick and tin, the double-axle stick and tin, and the double-axle laminated – but no single-axle laminated, which is a big portion of the market now – something you can just haul behind a Jeep or SUV as a weekender,” General Manager Brion Brady says.

The 19MBH is the fleet’s bunkhouse floorplan, offering campers a double-over-double bunk with 80-inch beds in the coach’s rear. In the front, a 60- by 76-inch Murphy bed pulls out to fit the whole family.

“We already knew there was that demand, so we’re just getting in the game,” Brady says. “For the most part, it’s a two-person weekender for all ages, whether that’s a young couple with kids or an older couple going out to mountain bike for the weekend.”

Research and design for the line didn’t take long, according to Brady. The RV maker knew exactly what it needed regarding floorplans and features to create the missing piece in its lineup. Customers will see a design that maximizes interior space, with features such as unique storage solutions – the 19MBH has space beneath the lower bunk – along with household vinyl flooring, hardwood cabinet doors and roller blackout night shades. The manufacturer also made sure to include a full-size bathroom.

“Another unique feature for something like this – with more of a demand for it – is Wi-Fi and solar capabilities, geared more toward the younger, off-grid campers who still want to use their laptops,” Brady says.

With an 81-inch interior height and ranging from 3,500 to 4,300 pounds, he says that size is what

makes the Super Lite Maxx unique. It’s a small, lightweight trailer to go off-grid, built using TuffShell walls with vacuum-bonded, laminated construction reinforced by fiberglass and welded aluminum frames. Fifteen-inch off-road tires and increased ground clearance are a standard, along with two 30-pound LP bottles and a 15,000-BTU air conditioner.

“It also has a PVC roofing material, where most manufacturers have a TPO or rubber roof. It’s better in high temperatures,” Brady says.

On top of the trailer’s white and shiny roof – which allows for better heat transfer – is a Thule rack for kayaks or canoes, which Brady says isn’t found on typical Starcraft units. Another new feature is the units’ front cap, made from ABS molded plastic as opposed to fiberglass.

The Super Lite Maxx has more of an aggressive tone with its graphics, wheel well, bumpers and diamond plate, Brady says. The travel trailer looks more edgy and off-road while keeping a classy feel, he says, offering the full package with an entry-level price.

“It’s just taking advantage of the opportunity in a very bullish RV market, and jumping into a segment with a tremendous demand,” Brady says. “It has a great look, great features and is still at a great price point – not targeting the very top-end, but not coming in as an entry-level unit – it’s right in the middle of the segment.”

What impressed RV PRO: This lightweight yet highly capable travel trailer is entering a niche with features that will likely fill all adventurer’s needs. The 19MBH’s bunks and Murphy bed can fit the whole family or offer the perfect amount of space for two. Finishing touches – such as the PVC roofing material, new front cap and Thule rack – make this an impressive unit for its small size. The floorplan also features an outside kitchen and convection microwave, allowing couples and families to make the most out of their weekend adventures in the wild.



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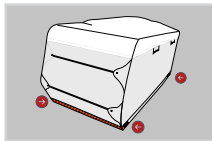


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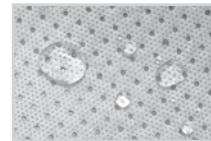
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STORAGE LOT



Heartland Cyclone 4014C

Toy haulers aren't just for toys anymore – especially when it comes to Heartland's Cyclone 4014C, a unit brimming with bigger features and family-friendly upgrades whose size barely cleared the production line.

After three months of development, General Manager Dustin Swindeman says the buzz the product is receiving is something he's never seen before.

"So far, it's one of our most desired units when it comes to not being in production. We launched after the first pilot, and usually it takes a long time to grow, but within a week we've been contacted almost 200 times," Swindeman says. The floorplan made its claim-to-fame on TikTok, having accumulated more than 15 million views within a few weeks.

While there were a few key objectives in the 4014C's design, Swindeman says the overarching goal was to hit all needs for not only toy hauler buyers, but also remote workers and larger families seeking to hit the road full-time.

"The toy hauler is a luxury crossover," Swindeman explains. "People are realizing these aren't just toy haulers – they're converting garages into bedrooms, too. A big factor for us is accommodating that.

"We've been after a two full-bath unit for a while," he adds. "A lot of the two full-bath floorplans have smaller garages, so we set out to do something with a 14-foot unobstructed garage. With the restrictions on square footage being lifted, that allowed us to go up to 479 square feet with this unit. Typically, every unit we've ever built has been around 429."

Measuring 47 feet, 6 inches from tip to toe with a GVWR of 21,000 pounds, the new floorplan has a redesigned front cap with flush-floor bath technology to get rid of bump-up in the front end, making space for a bigger walk-in closet. Swindeman says the unit has nearly double the amount of storage typically seen in Cyclone haulers.

In addition to featuring two full-baths, the 4014C includes an east-to-west bed and cross-conversational seating in the living room, making for good TV views.

Families wanting to hit the road full-time was the inspiration for the new floorplan's split loft. Rather than a single loft in the back – a typical Cyclone feature – the living area includes an additional, smaller loft geared toward kids or more storage.

"People love the loft in the back as a separate area for the kids, but we do get the family with a younger child who they don't feel comfortable sleeping in the garage by themselves," Swindeman says. "This gives you both features."

The spotlight also is on the floorplan's massive 25-inch pull-out grill and griddle, cut out inside the frame and stored underneath the exterior steps.

Customers will be pleased to see their requests for more freshwater filled by a new 150-gallon capacity, compared to the usual 100 gallons.

"We want to make sure we're giving campers all the needs and luxuries you'd expect to find at this price point," Swindeman says. "That's really our goal here. We love what we do, and we try to be trendsetters here, every year."

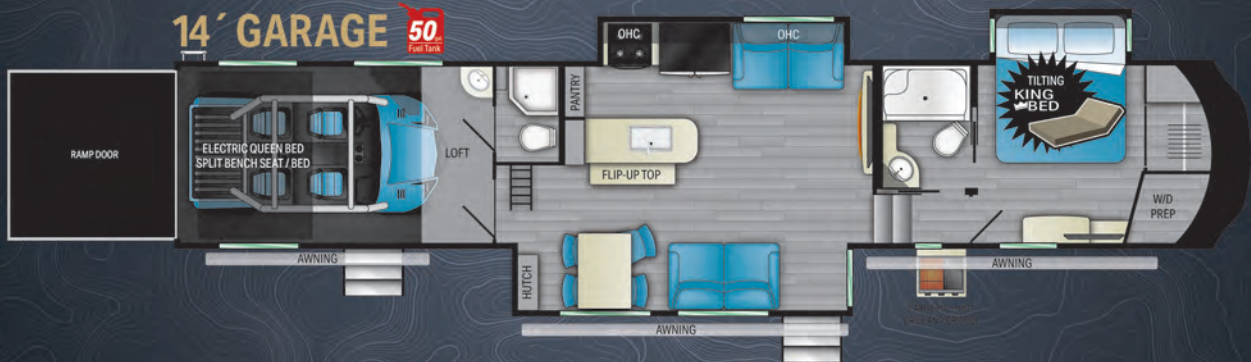
The Cyclone 4014C's projected MRSP is in the \$140,000 range.

What impressed *RV PRO*: It's safe to say the Cyclone 4014C is an epitome of "large and in charge." The 14-foot unobstructed garage paired with two full-size bathrooms makes this a great package for multiple markets. The new split loft design is a winner for families, along with more freshwater tank capacity and the large pull-out grill. Small touches like better living room seating and new exterior designs make this unit impressive for those wanting to hit the road full-time, with toys or not.



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Entegra Coach Accolade XL

Entegra Coach's new Accolade XL takes the familiar Accolade Super C motorhome to the next level, with luxurious features and added amenities that offer RVers a step-up.

The XL is built on the Freightliner S2RV diesel chassis and equipped with a Cummins engine. The goal was to offer owners more bang for their buck, complimenting the growth the Super C market has seen in the last year, according to Director of Product Development Pat Carroll.

"We know, after our first initial reaction at the Hershey show, that (consumers) like the additional amenities. If they can stretch their money to get it, they certainly did that – it just slightly beat its little brother in sales at the Hershey show," Carroll says.

"We're seeing younger buyers and we're seeing people who probably would have never thought about RVing at their age," he adds.

The XL is nearly \$25,000 to \$30,000 more than its counterpart.

Heated porcelain tile floors, high-gloss hardwood cabinetry, an electric Touchstone thermostat-controlled fireplace and Aqua-Hot heating and water system are a few features found within the XL, which comes in Entegra's signature Stonewall Grey interior design package.

Customers will see the familiar power driver and passenger seats in the cockpit, paired with a new 9-inch Sony infotainment center featuring Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. In addition, two 15,000-BTU air conditioners with heat pumps and four 6-volt AGM house batteries add to the amenities offered in the XL.

"When you go in, you immediately notice the luxury in it. I'm biased, but I think it's the prettiest Super C out there," Carroll says. "It's just a high-quality, rich look complemented by the floor tile and the furniture. And I like the exterior paint design."

Carroll says the era of exterior swirl patterns is

no longer – the XL will feature linear lines within its graphics and full-body paint schemes, which come in gray, blue, red and beige.

An outdoor entertainment center with speakers and an LED TV mounted on a swivel bracket adds to the exterior appeal, along with an outside shower and an entrance door with what Entegra says is the industry's largest travel-view window. Cargo features include lockable, pass-through storage compartments with metal slam latches. A power cord reel with 50-amp service as the unit's electrical hookup is also a nice feature to have, Carroll says.

The Accolade XL lineup features three floorplans – the 37K, 37L and 37M – which carry similar amenities, such as large wardrobes and a walk-around king-size bed, although the 37K offers a bath-and-a-half compared to a single bath in the other two layouts.

"As the price goes up, the more popular floorplans are always a bath-and-a-half," Carroll says. "We're able to get that in 37 feet, which is a shorter length, but people like to have it."

A two-burner induction cooktop, Entegra-exclusive legless dinette table, a 21-cubic-foot residential refrigerator and convection microwave cover campers' needs in the kitchen. The XL continues to spotlight luxury with a wood-framed kitchen window and adjacent spice cabinets, along with LED-lit solid surface countertops that have a flip-up extension in select floorplans.

Paired with E-Z Drive Premier for a smoother ride, that's where Entegra Coach's new Accolade XL comes in.

What impressed RV PRO: For less than 37 feet long, the Accolade XL is sure to impress buyers looking for the next level in luxury, space and accommodations for their time on the road. Thoughtful touches such as hardwood cabinetry, heated ceramic floors and dual A/Cs with heat pumps are sure to catch the eye of consumers seeking a powerful unit wrapped in a great package.

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2022

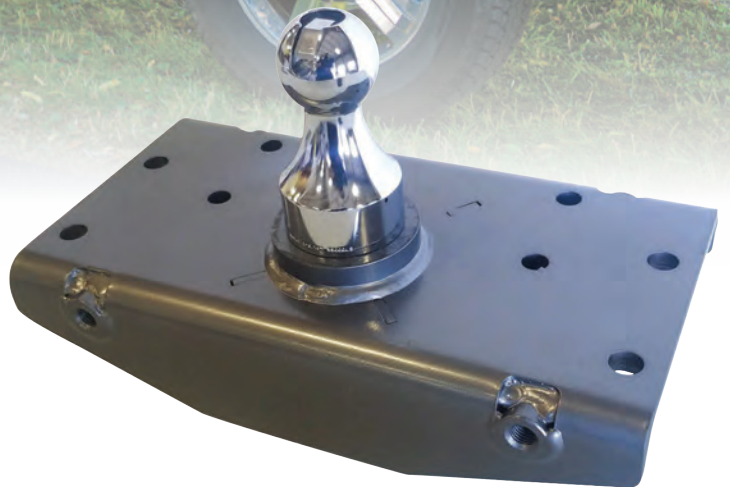
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Jayco North Point 340CKTS

When it comes to the North Point 340CKTS fifth wheel, Director of Product Development Mike Aplin says, “there are no boxes that don’t get checked.” Considered a stand-alone floorplan coming in just under 38 feet, the couple’s coach features an outdoor kitchen, generous storage space with hidden compartments and a bathroom with oversized amenities.

For the 340CKTS, keeping the unit under 40 feet while retaining an outdoor kitchen with a dedicated griddle and while also keeping dedicated pantry was a priority.

“Underneath on the off-door slide of the kitchen, you have big places for huge pot and pan storage. Typically, people have to use that also as their pantry. It’s kind of hard to have a pantry, pots and pans all together in one,” Aplin says. “By doing what we did, we retained that pot and pan storage, but then have a true stand-up, motion-lighted pantry – the best of both worlds. So, we have far more storage than anybody else that makes a similar floorplan.”

And it doesn’t stop there – a hidden storage compartment can be pulled out from behind the kitchen’s range hood, lifted by two strutted hinges.

Most notable interior enhancements were made last year to 2021 models, Aplin says, including a four-burner Insignia oven, JBL stereo system with a subwoofer and an extended butcher block. In addition to those, this new floorplan features a hidden pull-out countertop extension with extra drawers.

“We try to give you more useful storage than any manufacturer out there,” Aplin says.

In addition to ample storage, North Point spotlighted smart coach technology not typically seen in price points like the 340CKTS, he says. Jayco’s new voice command system – dubbed “JayVoice” – went live Sept. 28 and puts a spotlight on convenience, controlling 12 functions from lighting solutions

and A/C units to the coach’s furnace, along with a “movie mode” that dims lighting by about 40 percent when watching TV – all activated by saying the word “Jayco.” The innovation is tied into the unit’s BMPRO system and could control awnings and more as it becomes more scalable in the future, according to Aplin.

Meanwhile, the floorplan features what is the largest solar power package available on Jayco’s towable line to date, dubbed the Overlander EXT.

“The availability of solar is huge – everybody wants it. We came out with the first 12-volt air conditioner that you can run eight to nine hours on your battery pack, where typically you’d get about two hours on an A/C before you ran out (of power),” Aplin says. “It has six lithium-ion batteries – so 1,200 watts of solar, 100-amp charger, a built-in energy management system and more.”

Alpin notes the fifth wheel features a tri-fold sofa that turns into a bed for families who road-school.

“What I like about it is the space. For a smaller unit and a couple’s coach, it has just tons of storage, as well as hidden space,” Alpin says.

“If someone is looking for an outside kitchen in a similar floorplan, and they don’t have it, we have it. If they’re looking for additional pantry space, we have dedicated storage. If they’re looking for a bigger bathroom with a bigger sink, we check the box – tip top to bottom. And we back it with our industry leading 2-Plus-3 warranty – there’s just no boxes that don’t get checked.”

What impressed RV PRO: For a couple’s coach under 40 feet, the North Point 340CKTS seems to offer the full package. Storage space is abundant and owners can make use of their outdoor getaways with the outside kitchen and solar capabilities.

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East to West AHARA

East to West's newest offering, AHARA, takes its name from a Sanskrit term used in yoga philosophy meaning the "vehicle or support of consciousness and is one of the basic principles upon which health, happiness and harmony rests."

On a baser level, though, East to West AHARA Sales Manager Mark Krol says the brand takes everything its customers loved about the Tanderera fifth wheel and upgraded it to enter into the next segment of luxury fifth wheels.

"Since East to West started, we've had a very sequential plan for expansion," he says. "We had the entry-level Della Terra, the next year we launched Alta, the laminated travel trailer in 2019, and last year we launched Tanderera, a mid-profile travel trailer. We launched a Class C this spring and our next step was to go after the meat of the market: The luxury fifth wheel segment."

The newest addition, the AHARA, has three floorplans, the 325RL, 365RL and 378BH-OK, different from the seven floorplans Tanderera launched with. The three floorplans all feature a rear lounge and at least three slides. They keep the same living room and kitchen layout for efficiency. The 378BH-OK features bunk beds and an outdoor kitchen.

"We want to get really efficient at building those three floorplans. We chose them because we believe those are the three best-selling fifth wheels in that segment," says Krol. "Don't get me wrong, there are other floorplans people are looking for ... and those are certainly floorplans we'll develop over the next six to 10 months. A front living room floorplan and raised rear den floorplan are certainly one's we're working on."

The three biggest features East to West has chosen to focus on in the AHARA are three air conditioners, auto-hydraulic leveling and a wide-body chassis construction.

"Pretty universally, we heard from dealers that those were the three big ones," says Krol.

The double-door pantry and coat closet were home runs in the Tanderera, so Krol says they started with those as signature features on the AHARA. The pantry's right side is adjustable to be converted into a coat closet or broom closet.

The interior of the AHARA is a lighter interior wood, almost a light white-gray maple paired with a gray-brown continental gray for a two-tone contrasting look.

"Everyone who's seen it agrees it's a really beautiful looking fifth wheel," says Krol. "We chose the floorplans and features we choose because we're not trying to shoot for a fifth wheel that's living in the over \$100K retail category. We want these to come in at \$90K and below."

Krol says the RV manufacturer knows that, ultimately, no one absolutely must have a fifth wheel.

"It's an extra purchase people can live without," says Krol, who is quick to point out the fifth wheel's many quality features and benefits. "That's why we want the AHARA to work for them and fulfill all their needs, but hope they'll enjoy owning this thing and that it will make them happy."

What impressed RV PRO: While many details related to product specifications were still being finalized as of press time, it's clear a lot of consideration went into the design of the AHARA, particularly as relates to its functional design and comfortable interior. Notably, the fifth wheel costs considerably less than many comparable models.

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NoBo 10.8

“Wow! You weren’t kidding when you said open-air concept!”

That was one early, strong reaction inspired by someone seeing the NoBo 10.8 trailer for the first time – and it’s not likely to be the last.

Cody Schade, product sales manager for No Boundaries, says the NoBo product has been a brand that offers leading-edge technology and innovation since its inception four years ago.

“We want to continue to push the boundaries in terms of what the customer can do and where our campers can go,” Schade says. “This 10.8 pushes that envelope. We basically tore everything down to a chassis and then we only added back what was necessary to solve our issues at-hand. What you’re left with is a very rugged but versatile piece of equipment that can be used for hauling cargo and camping.”

Schade says NoBo customers encountered the issue of having space to bring their toys with them.

“Whether its dirt bikes, kayaks or side by sides, they want to take them with them and enjoy but don’t have the tow vehicle to bring them. They can either pull a cargo trailer or a trailer, but they can’t do both.”

The new NoBo solves that problem. It can pull a four-seat side-by-side all with full camping capabilities, including a roof-top tent for sleeping, full-outside kitchen and water, all under 5,000 pounds.

When empty, the NoBo 10.8 weighs 2,800 pounds. When full with a RZR and all the things needed to camp, Schade says it comes in at about 4,800 pounds. Campers can carry at least 60 gallons of fresh water.

Features include a 270-degree awning that doesn’t require any legs to the ground and an enclosed 6-foot by 6-foot area underneath the tent to be used as a changing room or potentially a portable bathroom.

“A unit this size can offer so many things, but

there has to be a little bit of a concession. Here it’s no onboard restroom,” says Schade. “But there is a full exterior kitchen, a two-burner gas cooktop and also a Truma refrigeration system. Another big part of this is the energy system. Most places our campers are going they might not have connection to shore power. It’s important they have power to run the unit whether they’re remote camping or not.”

NoBo 10.8 uses a product by company Goal Zero, which has a negative energy impact, meaning the unit produces more energy than it takes to run it. The 10.8 also has 200-watts of on-board solar and a 1,500-watt energy system.

There’s the option to put two tents on the top of the unit. It comes with one standard High Country 80-inch tent, which Schade says is almost the size of a king-size bed. The target price point for the NoBo 10.8 will be somewhere in the low \$30,000s. It can be towed with today’s top-selling small tow vehicles.

“It isn’t going to be for everybody,” Schade acknowledges. “We aren’t trying to market it for every camper, but it definitely fills in a gap for us. It redefines the line of what’s possible.”

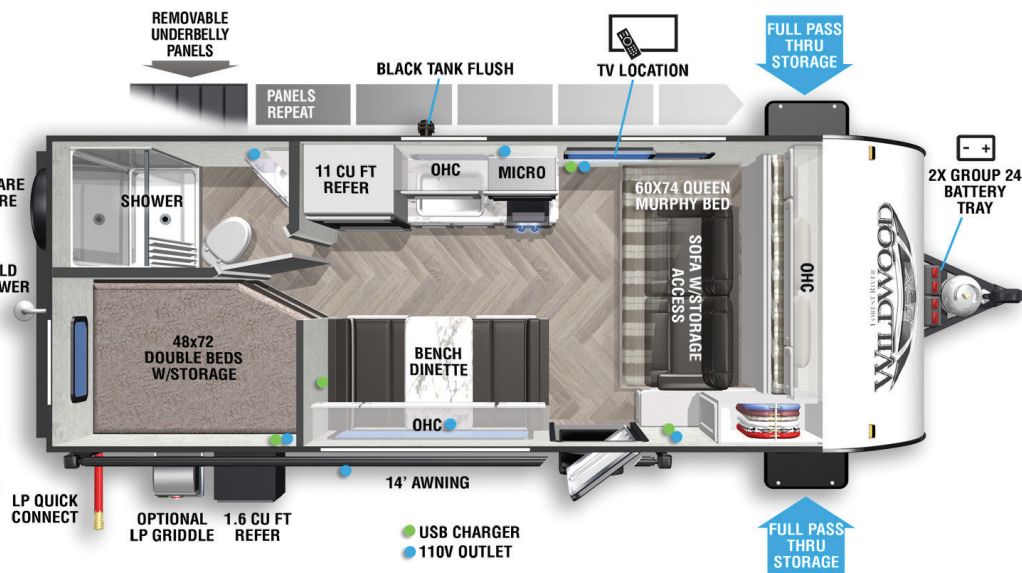
What impressed RV PRO: While this trailer is clearly not for everyone, it’s likely to be a hit with a certain demographic who can appreciate its hauling capabilities and minimalist, utilitarian nature.





the **CHEROKEE**
family has grown

TIMBERWOLF



Wildwood FSX 179DBK

Wildwood Product Manager Nick Schneider says the RV maker made the decision a few years ago to start the FSX division of Wildwood to produce micro trailers.

“We tried to do small features: small bunk area, small fridge, small sink, but we discovered we wanted full-size stuff – but in a small footprint,” Schneider says.

A traditional stick-and-tin unit, the Wildwood FSX179 is compact without sacrificing features. It weighs in at less than 4,000 pounds but still has the same bunk size, sofa and 11-cubic-foot refrigerator found in larger models.

The unique front queen bed flips up and creates additional seating space during the day. The kitchen comes equipped with a booth dinette, a panoramic window and modern appliances, while the rear bunkhouse provides double over double bunks.

Other standard features include a waterproof portable FM/Bluetooth speaker system, Herringbone pattern luxury extra-thick vinyl flooring and a new 11-cubic-foot, frost-free, double-door, 12-volt refrigerator. An optional extended power package comes with a roof-mounted 190-watt solar panel, a 30-amp

controller and battery. An option only available on the 179DBK is an outside kitchen griddle.

Schneider says the RV maker shaved some weight on the unit by making it a single-axle trailer and a narrow-body unit at 7.5 feet wide.

“It helps with the weight. SUVs can see around it and it’s shorter on the roofline as well. We’re shrinking the box on areas you might not necessarily notice it,” he says.

He adds that Wildwood didn’t compromise on the construction simply because the unit is smaller.

“We use the same nuts and bolts, the same wall construction, the same floor construction as on our full-size Wildwoods,” he says. “We didn’t compromise there.”

The product’s MSRP starts in the low \$30,000s.

“This is the third season we’ve had this floorplan out. We’ve made some small tweaks along the way, but by and large it’s remained unchanged,” Schneider says. “Whenever we create innovative products, our dealers always like that. It’s a good, competitive product people seek out.”

But that doesn’t mean Wildwood is not open to feedback. Schneider says the bonus of being around for a while is that owner groups have had a chance to form and grow.

“We’ve gotten a lot of feedback and made tweaks based on what people like,” he says. “We try as hard as we can to keep our ear open to those people that purchase and use them to find out what they love.”

The trailers received some model changes in August 2020, including an overhaul to the interior. Schneider says Wildwood went with brighter, lighter woods in its smaller coaches, as well as bigger and more windows to help open them up.

“That can be a challenge in these small trailers,” he says. “They can feel too compact if you don’t do it right. We combated that by using colors inside that popped.”





The FSX series currently has six floorplan offerings. Schneider says the most popular floorplan is the 178BHSK, which was completely born from the 179.

“It’s the 179 but with a big slide-out – the biggest one we could fit,” he says. “It makes for a lot of extra space in the floorplan and is a camper that’s sought after.”

What impressed RV PRO: For a relatively small trailer, the 179DBK makes good use of its available space, thanks in part to its unique front queen Murphy bed that flips up during the day to create additional seating. And while the 179DBK is compact, it doesn’t sacrifice features, including a regular-size sofa and an 11-cubic-foot refrigerator found in larger models.

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Impression 320FL

The biggest goal for the Impression 320FL floorplan was to allow the unit to be a mid-profile fifth wheel with a front living room without sacrificing unit head space in the upper deck, according to Doug Acker, Impression national sales manager.

“We thought, we should be able to do a front living room and keep our weight down in this lineup,” says Acker. “A front living room is not common in a mid-profile fifth wheel, due to the allotted height in the upper deck. With the ‘step up’

being eliminated in the upper deck, it allows for a 6-foot, 3-inch ceiling height with plenty of seating to take in the view through the windshield, or view of the actuated television.”

The kitchen has lots of cabinet storage, a pantry, a breakfast bar with barstools and a large window over the sink viewing the campsite. Acker says mid-profile fifth wheels also typically lack height in the bedroom and bathroom. With the bed and bath being in the rear, the bedroom height is 7-foot, 4-inches and the bathroom height is 7-foot, 10-inches. He says other standout features include Goodyear tires and ground control auto leveling.

The unique breakfast bar configuration allows Impression to eliminate a slide-out, keeping the weight down and allowing for the huge window over the sink. The total length of the 320FL is 40-feet, 2-inches, with a dry weight of 10,303 pounds and GVWR of 15,535. Its base MSRP is \$68,437.

While the fifth wheel is designed as more of a couple’s coach, it has two tri-fold hide-a-bed sofas for those RVers who might have grandkids they occasionally bring camping.

“Those customers want their living space, but at the same time they can have their grandkids or friends come. With their bedroom in the back, they can bring quite a bit of company,” he says.

The Impression 320FL started hitting dealers’ lots in late January of this year. And so far, Acker says reactions have been great.

“People say, ‘Oh, this is my favorite floorplan of anything I’ve seen.’ It’s hitting that perfect weight. People like the openness to the living room up front,” he says. “Taller customers enjoy that they can still stand up in the front living room but have taller space for the bathroom and shower, so they don’t even come close to hitting their hands on the ceiling.”





The interior color adds to the spacious feeling, with a light, bright inside right when the customer walks in. Interior kitchen features include a 10-cubic-foot, 12-volt refrigerator, a glass-recessed range with glass cover, a microwave with exhaust vent, tile backsplash, a stainless-steel single-bowl sink, a high-rise faucet with pulldown sprayer, a floor-to-ceiling pantry and natural lighting from the skylight.

In the bedroom, features include a gas-strut assisted bed lift with storage, full-size stackable washer and dryer prep, directional and closable A/C vents, outlet and 12-volt charging ports beside the bed and is even CPAP machine ready.

The living room has a 50-inch or 40-inch LED TV, an electric fireplace/space heater that produces 5,500 watts of heat up to 400 square feet, a soundbar, oversize opening windows, theater seating with USB charge ports on select models and a free-standing table with storage bench/ottoman.

What impressed RV PRO: There is a lot to love about the Impression 320FL, starting with its unique floorplan in a mid-profile fifth wheel, with a front living room without sacrificing unit head space in the upper deck. Meanwhile, the beautifully designed galley could put many residential kitchens to shame.



RVPRO

Best New Model

2022



Coachmen Cross Trail 20XG

The Class C Cross Trail lineup (previously labeled the Cross-Trek product) is designed for the adventure camper who wants to get to a location, get their gear out and get on their way.

The Cross Trail 20XG floorplan is designed to be even more user-friendly and with an all-electric setup. It comes standard with 400-amp hours of AGM batteries and no generator. It does have an upgradeable lithium option. The batteries run through a 3,000-watt inverter, giving the customer the capability to run the entire coach, air conditioning and all, off of battery power.

“They can go out and be completely quiet and not have to run a noisy generator,” says Nate Saunders, product manager.

The 20XG is built on a Ford Transit chassis with a standard 3.5-liter Eco-boost engine and dual 250-amp alternator. The engine can charge the batteries, so an RVer could potentially run the air conditioner while driving down the road.

Other features and options include available all-wheel drive, Azdel composite vacuum-bonded sidewalls, CrossFlex roof membrane, a molded fiberglass front cap, optional solar equipped for up to 380 watts of roof solar, an armless awning with LED lights and sensor, exterior entertainment ready, LP quick disconnect and a freshwater port.

The Cross Trail also has safety features such as the lane-keeping system, which is an adjustable system to activate either alert mode, assist mode or both. The pre-collision assist with automatic emergency braking can detect, alert and brake-assist when the vehicle senses a potential collision in front of you.

“We designed the floorplan to be an option for something that’s a convenient go-anywhere size. This achieves that goal but with enough exterior storage and off-grid power that you can bring everything

with you,” says Saunders.

The 20XG has a power-up and -down bed in the back with pass-thru storage that Saunders says is going to be the most exterior storage on any small Class C. A full-size bike can fit under the bed because of the power system.

“It’s quite a bit bigger even then what you would find on larger XLs. You can bring your bikes, tents, coolers and more,” Saunders says. “There’s a lot more exterior storage that you wouldn’t necessarily have with traditional conversion vans.”

The optional Extreme Package includes a lift kit, all-terrain tires and black out rims, and those are just some of the most notable items in the package.

“It’s going to be an optional package, but it’s also how we’ll be outfitting most of them,” Saunders says.

He says the Cross Trail took design cues from its European counterparts and lightened up the interior for an all-white contemporary look.

“It takes the size of the coach, which is 24 feet by 7 feet wide, and opens it up and makes it feel larger, brighter and more comfortable,” Saunders says. “It’s a departure from traditional RV values and traditional storage. Even the interior has a brighter, more contemporary younger look to it.

“We’re catching that Millennial family,” he adds. “The response has been great. We’re think it’s a home run. It falls at a perfect time in a market where you see overland-type customers growing in volume. It’s a perfect fit into that market.”

The Cross Trail 20XG’s estimated MSRP is \$130,000.

What impressed RV PRO: In an increasing crowded field of adventure-type vans, the Cross Trail stands out for having the features campers are sure to want, such as all-wheel drive and an all-electric power system, without breaking the bank.



Coachmen Cross Trail

The exhilarating Coachmen Cross Trail continues to bring innovative floorplans and cutting edge technology to the motorhome market. Offering unique abilities for unmatched gear storage, battery capacity, and solar capabilities, the Cross Trail allows a truly exciting RV experience. Coachmen Cross Trail is dedicated to lead the industry and continue to please our Customers.

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Coachmen Apex Ultra-Lite 266BHS

The Apex Ultra-Lite introduces a new floorplan, the Apex 266BHS, which features a large U-dinette, double over double bunks and a 60- by 80-inch queen bed with super storage.

“We took this prototype out to Hershey and it was the No. 1-selling model at Hershey. It did really well out there. There are three things that really stand out on it. It’s a floorplan that’s been done before, but we’ve made some improvements,” says Andy Brock, product manager.

The first feature is a swing-out pantry behind the TV entertainment center. When RVers pull a handle to open the entertainment center, half of the space is a coat closet and the other half is a pantry.

The second feature is the 266BHS’ super bed storage system. The whole 60-inch by 80-inch bed-frame lifts up and creates a walk-in closet under the bed area, even featuring a cushioned sitting space to put on or take off shoes and keep a laundry hamper.

The third feature Brock says is really popular is the outside kitchen. It sits on the bottom half of the entertainment center, outside on the door side in the middle of the coach. The outside kitchen has a fridge and two-burner cooktop.

Meanwhile, the back, bunk area has double over double 54-inch by 74-inch bunks that can be curtained off so there’s some privacy. It’s a unique setup in that the bunks are right behind the Footrest jack-knife sofa, which can also lay down

into a bed. RVers can go in the bottom bunk from the side or flip the sofa down and crawl across. Each bunk can sleep two comfortably, with the entire unit able to sleep eight to 10 people comfortably.

“When it’s open, it gives a real wide-open feel. There are two windows above each bunk that give an open-air feel to the floorplan,” Brock says. “The bottom bunk is very easily accessible. When the sofa is laid down it really creates a large sleeping space.”

There’s a walk-through bathroom with lots of storage and extra storage in the bedroom, in addition to the under-bed storage system. There are full-length shirt closets on both sides and storage overhead.

“We took pieces of existing floorplans and tried to perfect them to create a real special version,” says Brock. “That’s where we get the three things we put into this and added those special touches.”

The trailer has a fiberglass front cap with LED lighting and a window to complement the two-tone white/gray fiberglass exterior sidewalls. Standard features include slide topper prep, back-up camera mount, power tongue jack, outside speakers, four stabilizer jacks, hot/cold outside shower and 100-watt solar panel with 10-amp control charger.

The interior décor features a light-colored modern look with black accents. Brock describes it as a simplistic, modern look.

“We had 30 to 40 dealers here this week and they all loved the interior of it,” he says.

Another popular feature is the Keylite Key System, which eliminates all keys except for one. The same one key can be used to open baggage doors and entry doors.

What impressed RV PRO: With a MSRP starting in the low \$40,000s the Apex Ultra-Lite 266BHS is priced for the family without skimping on any amenities. The trailer’s storage space is impressive, as is its ability to sleep up to 10 people.

RV PRO

Best New Model

2022





Winnebago Micro Minnie FLX

New for 2022, Winnebago Towables introduces the Micro Minnie FLX, which takes the company's most popular towable and gives it extended off-grid capability.

Winnebago describes the FLX as providing "all the comforts of home in camp or for up to five days off the grid, without a generator or external hookups." The FLX is able to provide that extended off-grid experience thanks to five integrated technologies, according to Adam Christoffersen, senior product manager for Winnebago Towables.

First, the FSX comes standard with two 190-watt solar panels with a 30-amp charge controller, plus side-mount prep for an additional portable panel for maximum energy generation. Second and third, respectively, the FLX is equipped with a 3,000-watt inverter providing 110-volt power when needed, and a 320-amp-hour lithium-ion battery for days of unfettered power.

Fourth, the FLX is equipped with high-efficiency Truma systems: an Aqua-Go water heater, a Vario-Heat furnace and an Aventa air conditioner, which Christoffersen touts for its ability to run quietly. And fifth, the FLX comes standard with resource-maximizing appliances in the form of a Showermiser water saver and a 10.3-cubic-foot Dometic refrigerator that runs directly off the 12-volt batteries.

"We've managed to put a lot of stuff in a small package," Christoffersen says.

Part of the impetus for the FLX came from "Traveling Robert," aka Robert Morales, a YouTube influencer and Micro Minnie owner who has since become a Winnebago Towables brand ambassador. Winnebago was first introduced Morales a few years back. After Morales suggested Winnebago consider possible upgrades that could extend his off-grid camping experience, the RV maker developed a prototype model that it provided to Morales earlier this year, which resulted in his ability to camp off-

grid for up to five days.

Christoffersen notes that how long the average RVer can camp off-grid in an FLX will depend upon a variety of factors, primarily centered on how much they run the various appliances.

The new FLX 7-foot-wide trailer comes in four floorplans ranging from 21 feet, 11 inches to 25 feet, 8 inches and with dry weight of between 3,850 and 4,500 pounds, which makes it towable by a variety of vehicles. All four models come with a driver's side slide-out, giving it the capability to sleep between three and five people, depending upon the floorplan.

FLX trailers are all equipped with 31-gallon freshwater tanks, 25-gallon black tanks, and 25-gallon graywater tanks. An 18,000-BTU furnace and a 6-gallon water heater are standard on all models.

While the FLX trailers can make extensive use of solar power, they do come equipped with two 20-pound LP tanks, giving RVers added flexibility in powering their appliances.

Christoffersen says Winnebago sees the FLX as appealing to both traditional Micro Minnie customers who appreciate its new feature set, as well new customers who are specifically looking for a trailer offering extended off-grid camping. In either event, he notes the FLX has a lot of the same great "Red Thread" features found on all Winnebago Towable products, including power stabilizing jacks, tank pad heaters, fully enclosed and heated underbellies, accessory receiver hitches in the rear incorporated into the frame and Wi-Fi prep.

The MSRP for the four FLX floorplans was still being formulated as of press time.

What impressed RV PRO: It's no surprise why the traditional Micro Minnie is Winnebago Towable's top-selling towable – it packs a lot of desirable items into a small, lightweight package. The FLX line just builds on that with great features that make extended off-grid camping possible.

RVPRO

Best New Model

2022



Winnebago EKKO

Most of the overland market focuses on trucks and SUVs, but Winnebago could have those seeking adventures off pavement to look at its EKKO – a Class C unlike anything in its lineup.

“With the EKKO, you have the all-season capability and then you have the huge solar bank and everything’s optimized for living for days and weeks off the grid, if you want,” says Russ Garfin, director of product management, camper van and Class C’s. “We’re trying to create extraordinary experiences for our owners. To me, this is the latest and greatest effort at that and it’s the best so far at really checking all the boxes if your idea is that full flexibility of going anywhere at any time.”

One of Winnebago’s goals was to provide plenty of room for equipment, so Garfin’s team created a unique solution.

“We built a motorhome around having that gear garage,” he says. “We wanted to have something impressive in the back for storage. We have a lot of owners in particular that are wanting to haul bikes.”

The EKKO, available in two floorplans from 23 to 25 feet in length, can fit most styles of bicycles inside its garage, keeping them much more secure than if they were resting on a hitch-mounted rack.

“We wanted to make sure we could include those buyers in our potential customer base, so that’s why the gear garage was so important, but really, there’s just so many uses for having that much storage,” he says. “Having three big doors all the way around allows you to stack things however you want and be able to get at something without having to pull out everything else.”

The heated garage comes equipped with an L-track tie-down system, as well as charging ports and LED lighting. A removable rubber mat makes it easy to clean and Winnebago even included MOLLE panels on

the backs of the side doors for more storage options.

The EKKO is built on a Ford Transit 350 dually powered by a 3.5-liter EcoBoost V-6, but that’s not the best part. Ford’s all-wheel-drive system is part of the package, too, and that makes the EKKO more much surefooted past the end of the pavement. Notably, the chassis includes electronic features such as adaptive cruise control and pre-collision braking and blind-spot monitoring.

Winnebago considered every detail in the coach, even the door.

“We have a lot of people going places that aren’t traditional campsites and they don’t have the security of being around others in a campground, so having an entry door that is really beefy and has solid locks was really important,” Garfin says, noting even the screen door has a heavy metal mesh and also can be locked.

The EKKO even meets the Truma Gold Standard – an endorsement that goes beyond some specifications and a stamp, according to Garfin. Tested in Truma’s own climate chamber in Elkhart, Ind., the EKKO met the German company’s requirements for cold weather conditions.

Along with Truma’s AquaGo tankless water heater and its VarioHeat comfort coach heater, as well as a 13,500-BTU air conditioner, staying comfortable shouldn’t be a problem. The EKKO also has 455 watts of standard solar power and a 320-amp-hour lithium-ion battery to make camping away from shore power more enjoyable.

The base MSRP for the EKKO is \$171,845.

What impressed RV PRO: The EKKO is designed to travel where many other Class B or Class C models would fear to tread, while also being capable of storing bikes and other equipment in its gear garage. Earning Truma’s Gold Standard for meeting cold weather conditions also is a definite plus.



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EKKO



Micro Minnie FLX



RV PRO

Best New Model

2022



Newmar Bay Star Sport 3316

For 2022, Newmar has completely updated and upgraded its Bay Star Sport – the company’s point of entry into Newmar’s gas motorized line. And new for 2022, the RV maker has introduced the 3316 floorplan in the product lineup.

The Bay Star Sport is built on the next-generation Ford F-53 Class A motorhome chassis and is equipped with heavy-duty sway bars for improved stability. The motorhome is powered by a 7.3-liter, V8 engine offering 350 horsepower and 468-pounds-per-foot of torque. It features a Ford TorqShift automatic over-drive transmission.

For 2022, the Bay Star Sport features redesigned front and rear caps and exterior luggage doors, which are now 3 inches higher for increased clearance. Meanwhile, “just about everything was restyled” inside the coach, including new flooring, new furniture design, new countertops, new tile backsplash and new window treatments, says John Sammut, Newmar vice president of sales and marketing.

When Newmar presented its 2022 Bay Star sport motorhomes to dealers at its April event at the Gaylord Palms Convention Center in Kissimmee, Fla., dealer reaction was “extremely positive,” Sammut says, noting that dealers specifically appreciated the fact the motorhome’s value and styling is commensurate with Newmar quality but at a desirable price point designed for attracting customers ready to buy their first Class A motorhome.

“First-time buyers would be our primary demographic. We also have seen some people who have small Class B products that are compact needing something a bit bigger with more storage migrate to the Bay Star Sport,” he says.

And while the Bay Star Sport represents Newmar’s entry-level product, Sammut is quick to note that it stacks up very favorably against entry-level products offered by many of its competitors.

“In fit and finish, customers will see get a lot of

value for the money,” he says. “They could get something less expensive, but they won’t get something that’s a better value.”

Newmar has high hopes for the new-for-2022 3316 floorplan – a triple-slide with two slides in the front living area and a king bed that slides out of the off-door side in the bedroom.

In the cockpit, the dash has a completely new look and includes a wireless charging dock by the driver’s seat. An optional in-dash radio includes a 10-inch monitor.

The front living area provides opposing sofas, with a 74-inch Comfort Lounge (jackknife folding) seating area off-door and a 68-inch Comfort Lounge sofa with TV “Televator” on the door side.

The standard dinette booth is located on the door side, across from a large and functional kitchen. This galley also provides a pantry next to the refrigerator as well as a second pantry on the door side just forward of the pocket door separating the front living area, kitchen and dinette from the bedroom and bath area. A new Suburban gas cooktop, microwave and Norcold fridge come standard.

In the master suite at the back of the coach, there is a king-size bed on the driver’s side slide, opposite of the bathroom, which features a 40- by 30-inch shower, vanity and toilet.

The Bay Star Sport has a GVWR of 22,000 pounds. It comes with a 40,000-BTU furnace, a 92-gallon black tank, a 60-gallon gray tank, a 75-gallon water tank and a 25-gallon propane tank.

The MSRP for the Bay Star Sport 3316 is \$165,522.

What impressed RV PRO: The lifecycle upgrades to the Bay Star Sport, both inside and out, are dramatic and impressive – especially for what is considered to be an entry-level Class A motorhome. The new floorplan 3316 in particular is notable for creating an open feel in the coach thanks to the strategic position of its three slides.



PRESENTS

THE ADVENTURISTS

There's beauty everywhere.
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SCAN TO WATCH



Grand Design Momentum 397THS

Size matters when it comes to towables – especially toy haulers. Not only must there be enough living space, but the garage must have plenty of capacity, too. For 2022, Grand Design RV made sure its Momentum 397THS has lots of room for both.

“We took it to the Hershey RV show and we’ve always done well with that floorplan there,” says Lance Lees, project manager for the Momentum and Momentum G-Class line of travel trailers and fifth wheels. “I know our sales were up overall and the 397THS was particularly popular largely because we stretched the garage from 12-and-a-half feet to 13-and-a-half feet, so it’s able to accommodate 90-plus percent of the side-by-sides in the market.”

GDRV designed a new upper deck with a new wardrobe, plus dual access to the bathroom, Lees says. The bathroom layout was overhauled, too, with added storage for linens and other items.

“It has gone over very, very well. We also took advantage of the opportunity to stretch the kitchen slide as wide as possible, so it gives you maximum countertop space, maximum storage space, and then redesigned the entertainment center to accommodate flush-floor slides from the sofa slide,” Lees says. “Then, we also added a flush-floor slide into the kitchen to maximize your floor space and allow you to be closer to that range when you’re cooking.”

Meanwhile, Grand Design improved the toy hauler’s look.

“We completed revamped our exterior and really got innovative with it. We kept the same colors and went monochromatic. Almost all the toy haulers I’ve ever seen have the black band for the skirt metal and the white gelcoat,” Lees says. “We took the next step.

We went from a white color-matched skirt metal to black and then back to white and worked the graphics into it.”

Besides the roomier garage, the 2022 toy hauler’s bedroom should really stand out to customers, he says, with its deep storage, washer-dryer prep, his-and-hers closet pullouts and more floorspace. Lees also is confident customers will be wowed by the middle of the coach.

“The new kitchen slide has all the countertop space for your prep room and then we have a nearby island with the sink and the fridge right there. It’s about as functional as you’re going to get on any toy hauler,” he says.

There’s an option for a super sofa on the 10-foot camp-side slide, but Lees believes more customers will go for the standard theater seats and freestanding dinette arrangement. As the 397THS is geared toward full-timers, it was important to give them a dedicated place to eat.

Still, Lees acknowledges the key feature of any toy hauler is in back.

“That’s the beauty of toy haulers and why the customer base is so diverse,” he says. “It’s a garage if you need it to be, it’s card table room, it’s a bunk room, it’s a patio.”

The MSRP for the 397THS is just under the \$130,000s.

What impressed RV PRO: In a home, people gather around the kitchen, and RVs are really no different, even if it’s a toy hauler. GDRV has acknowledged that belief big time with the tweaks it made to this kitchen. Foodies now have a great place to both prepare and serve meals.

RV PRO

Best New Model

2022

Renegade Explorer



Something old, something new is the perfect way to describe Renegade RV's Explorer, a Super C motorhome that debuted at September's Hershey RV show.

"We looked at our Verona LE, and that's on a Freightliner M2 106 chassis, so you're limited on the capabilities such as towing and speed and torque," says Dwayne Kazmierczak, director of sales and marketing. "The next step up for us was the XL – and that was quite a bit more money than an LE. So, we thought 'why don't we do an LE on steroids and see where it comes out?' Our engineering team came together and we basically took most of the features that were already available in an LE and we put it on that brand-new Freightliner Cascadia P4 chassis, so now we've got more than 500 horsepower and a lot more torque. It's going to tow 20,000 pounds and it makes a big statement going down the road."

The Explorer, which has a MSRP of \$499,000, is so new that only one of the two floorplans, the bath-and-a-half 40ERB, was ready to show at the Hershey show. Still, Renegade dealers have had no problem getting orders for the Explorer sight unseen, according to Kazmierczak, who says he believes the reason is clear.

"There's not really anything else like it out there at that price," he says. "We're actually creating a new price segment by putting in between the XL and the LE. Usually, that used to be a point where people leapfrog and they'd have to spend a couple of hundred thousand dollars more to go up from an LE to get to an XL. Now, we're bridging that gap basically at about \$100,000, and you're getting a big truck."

The Explorer continues to impress inside.

"Our wood finishes are, I think, second to none. As you listen to people walking through the unit,

that's one of the first things they see," Kazmierczak says, noting Renegade ensures the components are made of quality furniture-grade hardwood.

Another feature he says make the Explorer stand out is the flow of each floorplan.

"We have a great engineering staff here and a good product development team. It could be just the placement of a toilet or how we're laying things out. Those are things that are noticeable," he says.

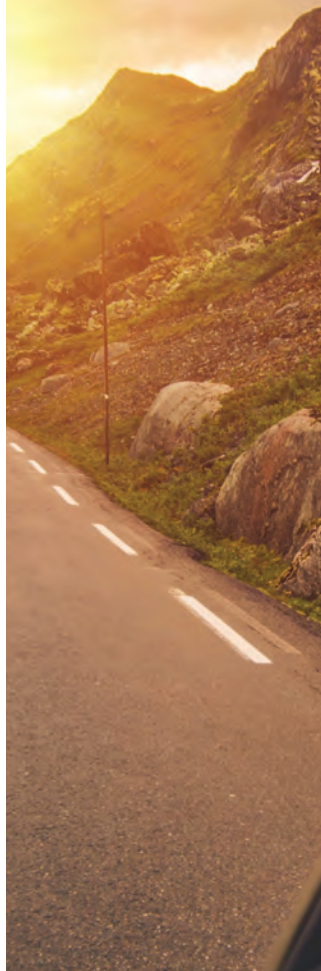
Renegade has always focused on storage, according to Kazmierczak, not only on the inside, but underneath, too.

"We build our own baggage doors," he says. "When you're shutting those doors, it feels like you're closing doors on a Mercedes or a Cadillac. There's a solidness to the product that you can't necessarily put into words."

The company's goal for all of its products is quality, but Kazmierczak is almost as proud of the Explorer's chassis.

"You're going to have a lot more towing ability, a lot more grunt in this thing going through the mountains where our competition is on a lower chassis, so that's not in the same ballpark even though it's the same money," he says. "I think our chassis separates us right away from our competitors. There's no other product out there for the dollars that will get this chassis and all the other amenities that we're including in the Explorer."

What impressed RV PRO: The Explorer's Freightliner chassis offers plenty of power and towability. Then there's the attention to quality details inside the coach and out, such as wood facias and baggage doors.





Lance 960

When creating products, RV manufacturers have a critical choice to make: Build what they believe customers will buy or build what they know customers will buy. The Lance 960 truck camper – introduced as a 2021 model – is definitely a result of the latter approach.

“We survey every one of our new owners and we get about 40 percent of those surveys back, which is pretty substantial. And they tell us what they like and don’t like or what they’d like to see in new products,” says Bob Rogers, Lance Camper’s marketing director. “We said, ‘OK, if you could have your perfect hard-side truck camper, what would it be?’ We started putting down all these specs and features and designing the 960.”

Lance was almost through that process when a truck camper website published its 2020 survey of what readers wanted in a hard-side camper, according to Rogers. Of the 57 questions covering weight, length, tank sizes, key features and more, the 960 correctly answered 56.

For example, Rogers says the website survey respondents wanted a model weighing between 3,000 and 4,000 pounds with a length of between 8 and 10 feet. The revised-for-2022 960 – aimed at long-bed trucks – weighs about 3,200 pounds and measures an inch shy of 10 feet. The results also showed a 70 percent preference for no slides – the opposite of what towable and motorized buyers have long demanded.

“They just want simplicity. They love the fact they don’t have to worry about the slide-out and its mechanism, plus less intrusion for water. Truck camper people are not as concerned about space as most people in travel trailers and other segments. They’re used to living in a pretty confined area,” Rogers says. “That was a surprise to me, but our customers asked the same thing: ‘When are you going to come out with a long-bed, non-slide model?’”

Most on the website survey didn’t want the conventional dinette, either.

“We already had that planned. In this floorplan, you can get either two lounge chairs or what I call a theater seating setup,” he says. “The theater seating is just, to me, phenomenal. It’s very comfortable.”

Lance also met website survey expectations in other important areas. The freshwater tank, for example, holds 45 gallons. And the 960 is a true four-season model, like its larger and smaller siblings, with aluminum framing and fiberglass siding.

The only box Lance didn’t check for the website survey respondents was in the windows, as the latter preferred glass instead of the 960’s acrylic. Truck camper owners tend to go off-road and may rub against trees and brush while going down unimproved roads, Rogers says, so they’re concerned about scratching acrylic windows. Yet, that hasn’t been an issue on Lance travel trailers, which transitioned to acrylic some time ago.

“The other thing we love about the acrylic windows is they open up basically to give you a full 90-degree opening, which for ventilation is fantastic,” he says.

Lance also chose to make any options that received an 80 percent take rate in the 960’s first year standard for 2022, meaning the truck camper will come with an awning, a microwave, electric jacks and keyless entry. Also new for 2022 are three decors that should satisfy almost any customer.

The base MSRP for the 960 is \$45,463.

What impressed RV PRO: Replacing the conventional dinette with two lounge chairs or the optional theater seating setup makes complete sense for this floorplan layout. Other great features include the stylish modern interior and the strategic placement of windows, offering plenty of light inside the coach.

Fleetwood Frontier

More for less is still a concept some manufacturers take to heart when creating new products – and for Fleetwood, the storied company's new Frontier Class A diesel coach is a shining example.

"The whole idea behind what the Frontier is boils down to how we create a luxury motorhome without the luxury price tag," says Doug Miller, Fleetwood's motorhome product manager. "Just walking up to the coach, you can see that it's a high-end-looking unit with high-end floorplans."

The Frontier – situated between the Pace Arrow, Fleetwood's entry-level diesel pusher and the popular Discovery – replaced a previous offering that wasn't a big seller, according to Miller. When he considered the specifications of a new model, the chassis was the first consideration, followed by the engine and transmission combo, tire size, stance, luggage space and several other aspects.

Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp. – Fleetwood's diesel chassis supplier – provided its XCR raised-rail model as the Frontier's base. It's a step above the Pace Arrow's XCS straight-rail chassis, but not quite the same as the XCM modular rail version used in Discovery and other, larger coaches, according to Miller. The challenge for Fleetwood and its bridge supplier was how to create large basement storage without the weight and cost.

"We took those things that we had learned over the years and we integrated them with some engineering genius and the guys back in development to put this thing together from the ground up to the beltline," Miller says. The result is what Fleetwood calls the Freedom Sport Foundation, and according to Miller, it adapts the best parts of the Freedom Bridge found under its bigger stablemates to the Frontier's shorter lengths.

Motivation is provided by a Cummins 6.7-liter engine offering 340 horsepower with 700 pounds-per-foot of torque. The transmission is an Allison

2500 six-speed automatic. The tires are a size larger than the Pace at 275/80R22.5 and the Frontier, available as a 34GT or 36SS, was given a taller stance in keeping with its place in the lineup.

Miller also touts the motorhome's Aqua-Hot 250D, a diesel-fired system that feeds off the engine fuel tank and provides the hydronic heating and continuous hot water throughout the coach.

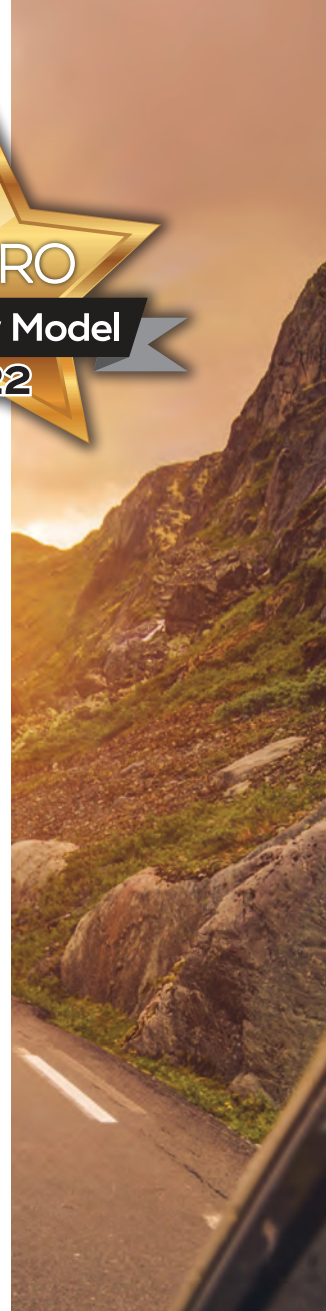
In addition, basement space is easily accessed via suicide doors to the main bays that open from the center out, Miller says. In both the 34GT, a triple-slide single-bath model, and the 36SS, the triple-slide bath-and-a-half version, Fleetwood offers a full-bay slide tray, a popular option.

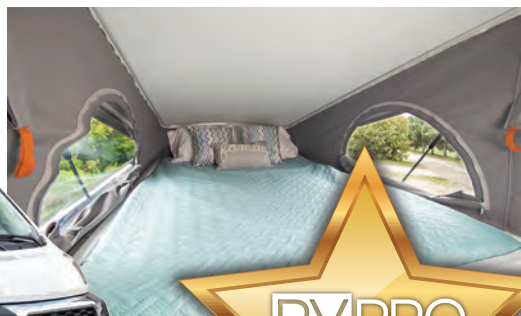
"It has all those things that a customer would need to do a weekend tailgater or to take a two-week vacation or if you want to extend it to a full-timer's coach, it works for anything. It's a very versatile build," Miller says.

Still, Miller says he believes the 36SS will probably sell a few more units as the bath-and-a-half is popular, too, because it's so handy when a family is onboard or when a couple is hosting guests.

Fleetwood's MSRP for the 34GT is \$320,323. For the 36SS, the MSRP is \$324,413.

What impressed RV PRO: This is not a coach for the introvert; the Frontier's cap design and graphics make it stand out big time among the competition. There doesn't seem to be a bad angle from the outside, either, and even sitting still, the Frontier seems like it's in motion.





RV PRO

Best New Model

2022

Roadtrek Play Slumber

When Roadtrek debuted the Play Class B motorhome for the 2021 model year, the marketplace stood up and applauded – loudly, according to CEO Dane Found.

“The Slumber has been tremendously received,” he says. “Probably one of the best initial launches of any product we’ve brought out, for sure.”

Both dealers and customers loved it, he says, but then the questions started: Why not add a pop-top – that extra sleeping area up top that changes the dynamics of what’s possible in terms of the number of campers?

The answer is the Play Slumber.

“Obviously, there’s many companies that have come out with a pop-top unit, but it is exploding as far as popularity in this segment, to the point that we are bringing out another Slumber version but in our popular Play, value-priced unit,” Found says. “It’s essentially the same (Slumber) unit with a few of the bells and whistles removed to try to keep the price point a little more reasonable for some people.

“Had the Slumber not been the success it was this last year, there probably wouldn’t have been a need for us to introduce a Play version as well. It has just gone through the roof – no pun intended,” he adds.

The Play is Roadtrek’s entry-level Class B. To convert the Slumber into a Play-like coach – to remove those bells and whistles – involves a significant change in its manufacturing methods, Found says, in the interest of customers who will happily trade some aesthetics in exchange for a lower sticker price.

“Roadtrek, when we first bring the van into our facility, we bring it into what we call a ‘strip-and-cut’ area where we pull off all the OEM body moldings and all those things on the outside of the van, and we have those sanded down and painted to match the van,” says Found. “Now, in a Play we don’t do that. ... Our Play version of the Slumber won’t have that – it’ll have just the OEM black pieces on the outside.

“It comes standard with AGM batteries as opposed to the lithium that you get in a regular Slumber. We don’t put the leather interior in it that we do in all

our other Roadtreks,” he adds. “So, we’ve tried to shave out some of the expensive accessories that we do with every Roadtrek and it doesn’t really change the functionality for most people.”

The Play Slumber rolled out with just one floorplan that’s 20 feet, 9 inches in length and with a GVWR of 9,350 pounds. One of its more unique features, Found says, is the location of the pop-up on the roof: It’s in the center, not in the back-half, as most pop-tops are. This allows sleepers in the pop-top to use the bathroom without disturbing those sleeping in the back of the coach, and vice-versa. A small thing, maybe, until it’s 2 a.m. at the campsite and time to take care of business without waking the kids.

“I think that’s one of the biggest pluses for our floorplan,” Found says.

The underbelly of the Play Slumber is exactly the same as its older brother, the Zion Slumber.

For its chassis, Roadtrek uses the extended version of the ProMaster 3500 Series.

“Some of our competitors are building a pop-top on the smaller, the 1500 series chassis, so it really limits the amount of cargo capacity, or GVW, when you drop down to that size of chassis,” Found says. “Some are building it on 2500s, but everything we build here at Roadtrek now is on a 3500 version of the ProMaster. And as I said, we’re building it on the extended version, which gives you about 14 inches longer and more interior space than the shorter version.”

Unlike with the exterior of the coach, all of the “bells and whistles” that come with a ProMaster 3500 chassis remain intact, he said.

What impressed RV PRO: Adding a pop-top for extra sleeping space has become commonplace in the Class B market these days, but it’s clear that Roadtrek put a lot of thought into the design and layout of its Play Slumber to make it functional for users ... and to be able to offer something to consumers at a favorable price point compared to so many competing motorhomes.



GET OUT AND PLAY



The Play Slumber is ready for any journey.

The Play Slumber is the perfect family friendly entry level coach, offering a practical and reliable motorhome with all the comfort you need to get out and play.



Alliance Avenue

Since Alliance RV's founding in 2009 by brothers Coley and Ryan Brady, the pair vowed to release only one new model each year – and this year's Avenue demonstrates the care that is being put into each year's rollout.

"Avenue is a feature-rich, wide-body, customer-driven fifth wheel that is truly focused on delivering a mid-profile fifth wheel in an easier towing package," says Ab Saleh, Alliance's general manager and overseer of the Avenue line. "One of the things that truly differentiates us from what we've seen in this segment is 101-inch-wide body construction. We couple that with 7-foot-tall slide boxes and a really light and bright décor. It's just a really spacious offering."

That 101 inches is 5 inches more than the standard for that type of model, according to Saleh. And all three Avenue floorplans come with those 7-foot-tall slide-outs.

The Avenue was built to appeal to those who have wanted to purchase a fifth wheel but were perhaps looking for something at a lower price point, or at a size that would provide more vehicle options for towing.

"The first floorplan that we came out with was the 32 RLS. That's a 35-foot couple's coach coming in at about 10,500 pounds. Our second floorplan was the 30 RLS. It's really the 32 with a different bedroom configuration. It's a north-south setup, and what that allowed us to do was save a couple of feet – it comes in as 32 feet – and a thousand pounds. It comes in right at 9,500 pounds," says Saleh. "Our third and newest floorplan is what we're calling a 36 BRM. That will be our largest Avenue; it comes in at 39 feet, 9 inches, and it is weighing around 11,700 pounds. It is our first true bunkhouse – it's an awesome floorplan and we got a lot of great feedback on it."

Again, customer input guided the hands of the company's engineers, according to Saleh.

"What's really unique about that layout is, it's a bath-and-a-half and that bunk room – we have two sleeping areas that are 66-by-74," he says. "It just accommodates a lot of situations, whether that's sleeping children or a couple of friends or grandparents. It serves a lot of purposes back there."

One detail that applies to all three floorplans is the unit's tank sizes.

"I think we have industry-leading tank sizes on this – at least in the mid-profile category," Saleh says. "Ninety-eight gallons on our fresh, 106 on our gray and 53 on our black tank."

Other standard features of the Avenue include a completely carpet-free interior, and the entire coach features designer accent lighting operated by dimmer switches.

"When you're talking about the kitchen in particular, we have a really unique offering: Our flush-floor kitchen slide-out," Saleh says. "Historically, what I've seen on that slide-out is a 1-inch-and-a-half, 2-inch lift, that just creates an awkward stance when you're trying to prepare food. This eliminates that – you're standing flush."

And those large slide-outs presented another opportunity for the designers.

"Because of the 7-foot-tall slide boxes, we were able to incorporate some really big windows on the right side, right on the door side of your fifth wheel, and it just creates a panoramic view of your campsite," Saleh says.

One product feature that most people won't see is on the Avenue's underbelly, which is fully heated and enclosed. Also notable, the fifth wheel is warranted for full-time living.

What impressed RV PRO: It's obvious that Alliance takes customer feedback and input to heart and replies applies those suggestions to the real-world design of the Avenue, from quality of materials used to the RV's functionality.



Pleasure-Way Rekon

Making the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter into a luxury Class B coach has become a standard practice for RV manufacturers over the years.

Turning what's essentially a van into a capable off-road camper is a much more daunting task requiring much more effort, but it has proven worthwhile for Pleasure-Way as its recently introduced Rekon continues to gather momentum in the market.

Based on a Sprinter 2500-based four-wheel-drive unit with a short wheelbase, lots of ground clearance and a minimalist interior, the Rekon is a marked departure for Pleasure-Way. The Canadian-based company made its mark in the industry in the late 1980s making highline Class B's, but until this year, its well-appointed motorhomes were designed for pavement.

"Our typical consumer would be 65-plus, retired, two people who are going to go tour the country," says Pleasure-Way CEO Dean Rumpel. "The Rekon's demographic is a little bit younger, but they're still fairly affluent, obviously, and they're more on the adventure side where they're going to go off the beaten path. They're going to take their mountain bikes and kayaks to do more exploring off the grid, per se, than touring and staying at campgrounds every night."

That's why Pleasure-Way chose a lean chassis configuration. The Rekon, measuring just under 20 feet long, doesn't have duallies unlike some other Class B competitors.

"Looking at the market, single-rear-wheel four-wheel drive is just more popular than dual-rear-wheel four-wheel drive," Rumpel says. "I think it's just a little bit more nimble in getting places, and looking at the market demand, that seemed to be the segment that was growing the quickest."

The motorhome also doesn't have a generator. Instead, four 100-amp-hour lithium batteries send their energy through a 2,000-watt pure-sine wave inverter to power the coach. On the Rekon's roof is a quartet of 100-watt solar panels for keeping the batteries charged. There's no air conditioner, either, as the Rekon instead depends on a pair of Dometic Fan-Tastic fans for cooling duties.

The four-season coach relies on an LP-fueled furnace and water heater, both by Truma, but instead using a large tank under the coach that might cause clearance issues off road, the Rekon uses a 20-pound propane tank. It's the same tank used by barbecue grills and it's easily refillable or exchangeable almost anywhere.

The heated wet bath is well-designed, too. Host to a cassette toilet, it doubles as a closet and drying area for soggy clothes thanks to a removable shelf and

closet rod system. There's no typical RV fridge in the Rekon, as Pleasure-Way believed a Truma C60 (a removable electric cooler that can be used as a refrigerator or freezer), would be more appropriate considering the customer base.

Rumpel is especially proud of the garage, noting among its like-sized competitors, the Rekon has the most storage space at 124 cubic feet with its class-leading 70-by-72-inch Murphy bed stowed. Even when the coach is prepped for sleeping, 52 cubic feet remain underneath. That's no mean feat considering Pleasure-Way built the Rekon's 40-gallon freshwater tank underneath the garage floor, but still inside the unit. The tank even benefits from ducted fan to ensure it won't freeze in cold climes.

The base MSRP for the Rekon is \$171,600.

What impressed RV PRO: The Rekon is built to travel where other Class B's fear to tread, and its garage space is a truly noteworthy feature. Besides sleeping and storage, one side of the Murphy bed converts to a handy workstation. Spacious and versatile are just two words that describe it, but customers will undoubtedly think of more.





Little Guy Micro Max

In the works since 2019, Xtreme Outdoors is officially introducing the Little Guy Micro Max for 2022. Company founder Joe Kicos says this latest teardrop travel trailer completes the “Max” family, becoming the smallest, lightest weight trailer yet. (It joins the Max and Mini Max lineup, with dry weights of about 3,000 and 2,300 pounds, respectively.)

The Micro Max is 15 feet, 11 inches long and has a dry weight of between 1,780 and 1,880 pounds, depending upon the options installed, which Kicos says makes it towable by a wide variety of vehicles, including a Subaru Outback. The Micro Max has a GVWR of about 3,500 pounds.

“This product makes us accessible to a larger group of customers,” he says.

The trailer has an overall height of 6 feet, 10 inches and an interior height of 5 feet, 8 inches, which Kicos says means the average RVer can stand up inside the trailer.

Kicos touts the Micro Max in part for its teardrop-shaped aerodynamic design and its curb appeal, its light weight and the fact that it is garage-able, which is particularly nice when so many homeowner associations have restrictions on RVs parked outside of homes.

“We’re very excited about this unit. It’s very unique; I don’t see anything in the marketplace quite like it,” Kicos says. “It tows great.”

And while the Micro Max comes in a smaller package, it still has many of the quality features found in the Max and Mini Max trailers, including the use of Azdel composite sidewalls, synthetic flooring and Euro windows, according to Kicos.

“The build quality and the quality of the part that we’re using in the other two products, we’re using in this RV as well,” he says. “So, we’re not compromising the quality of the product.”

The Micro Max is currently being offered in one floorplan. That open floorplan features a queen bed in the rear and a front dinette with Lagun tables that converts into a twin bed. Kicos says the trailer has seating for six and will sleep three adults.

The interior kitchen features a two-burner stove, a microwave, a Dometic refrigerator and a faucet and sink. Kicos touts the use of large windows that let in plenty of light.

The Micro Max features an external shower on the driver’s side. The trailer does not include a bathroom, but Kicos says it’s possible for customers to include a portable toilet, if desired. The trailer comes with a 15-gallon freshwater tank and a 9-gallon graywater tank.

It also comes standard with an air conditioner, furnace and TV. A Touring Package is available that includes solar power panels, a roof rack and equipment to make it off-road ready.

Kicos says he has taken the Micro Max out for road testing, as well as to showcase the product for dealers across the country – and those dealers like what they see, he adds. While supply chain issues are causing some headaches currently, Kicos says he believes that by spring or early summer dealers can expect to receive their first Micro Max trailers.

A base MSRP has yet to be finalized for the Micro Max, but Kicos says he expects it to be somewhere in the mid-\$20s.

What impressed RV PRO: The Micro Max proves that good things can come in small, and in this case, light weight packages, which the standard pickup, SUV or sedan can tow. And it does so without sacrificing any of the key ingredients that make Little Guy products so desirable.





Chinook Suite Dream

Although its roots in the RV world date back to the 1950s, Chinook RV only entered the travel trailer market in 2018, with the introduction of the Dream.

New for 2022 is what General Manager Jeff Butler calls the natural evolution of the Dream, with materials and furnishings upgraded to push it into the next level in terms of amenities and price point.

“We started out with the Dream back in 2018 when Chinook first started producing travel trailers, so we’ve been building the Dream now for three years, and this is kind of the next logical step to elevate it into a different part of the market,” says Butler.

The upgrades start on the outside, he adds.

“It’s a premium fiberglass exterior,” Butler says. “We’ve chosen to use a higher quality, higher grade of fiberglass on the outside, versus metal. Our current Dream travel trailer has a typical stick-and-tin metal exterior, and this gives it a completely upgraded skin – to fiberglass.”

The Suite Dream also has frameless windows instead of framed ones, which gives the coach a “cleaner, sleeker appeal,” says Butler.

Step inside the coach and the reason “Suite” is in the name really becomes apparent, according to Butler.

“We’ve got a residential bedspread, pillows, shams, some accent pillows in certain areas, a nice, upgraded valance package to really dress up the interior,” he says. “The product name ‘Suite Dream’ is what this is about. We’re trying to build a trailer that has more luxury items, just an upgraded feel overall.”

The Suite Dream shares the same chassis and frame with the standard Dream trailer, but the upgraded model comes with an enclosed and heated underbelly as a standard feature. Also standard on this trailer are the front and rear stabilizer jacks, power tongue jacks and a 200-watt solar panel.

“We chose ways to build a better trailer to differentiate ourselves from what’s already on the market,

as well as enter that part of the market, so that we have a presence there,” Butler says.

The Suite Dream has rolled out with six floorplans, one of which features a slide-out, which houses a sofa and dinette set.

The six trailers range in length from 21.5 feet to 33.1 feet. The GVWR varies by model, from 5,140 to 10,280 pounds. The MSRP begins at \$31,581.

What impressed RV PRO: Rather than making a few tweaks here and there, Chinook’s Suite Dream is a major upgrade to the original Dream. From the complete fiberglass exterior to the upgraded soft goods package that takes it from an average hotel room to a suite, this is a strong entry by Chinook into the upscale travel trailer market. **RV PRO**



Engaging Employees

By Phillip M. Perry

Particularly in today's tighter labor market, it's imperative for employers to keep their best players actively engaged in carrying out their key responsibilities.



Hire motivated people who will help your business grow.

That popular mantra for creating a productive work force has always been easier said than done. And today the challenge is tougher than ever, thanks to slim pickings in the candidate pool. Many workers furloughed or exiled to home offices during the pandemic have been rethinking their personal goals. Do they really want to return to a workplace where they never felt engaged? Or join one that promises nothing but dull routine?

Today's tighter labor environment comes at a time when hiring errors and subpar performance can seriously impact the bottom line. As advances in technology have reinforced the need to exceed the competition's productivity levels, employers need workers who will perform at the highest levels possible.

"In this competitive environment, companies have downsized considerably," says Pete Tosh, founder of The Focus Group in Macon, Ga. "As a result, they really need to accomplish more with fewer employees."

Understanding Engagement

The good news is that businesses can take steps to attract and retain "A players." The process begins with an understanding of the forces that propel top achievers, according to William J. Rothwell, professor of workforce education and development at Pennsylvania State University.

"There is a difference between motivation and engagement," he says. "Motivation is internal to people while engagement is a passion for what they do. Engagement requires a match between the person's passions and their daily work activities."

Employees who are both motivated and engaged contribute maximum value to their employers. Not only do they get more easily into the flow of their work, but they reduce costly turnover by sticking around longer.

"A recent Gallup survey shows that engaged employees drive 12 percent more profit," says Tosh. "They are far more productive and lead to higher customer satisfaction."

Before taking steps to improve employee engagement, a business needs to assess how its staff currently feels about their work environment, according to Tosh.

"The most common misconception by employers is thinking people are engaged when they aren't," he says.

A close look at employee attitude is likely to be eye opening. A recent Gallup report revealed that only 36 percent of employees



"Sometimes your cynics are your best critics. Make a focus group out of them. Then you can really work on removing barriers to efficient employee performance."

– Bob Verchota, senior consultant at RPVerchota & Associates



How to Motivate the Disengaged Person

Dave has always been one of your best employees. Lately, though, he no longer goes the extra mile. Clearly, he is disengaged.

What can you do?

Don Phin, a management consultant in Coronado, Calif., offers the following suggestion: Dave's supervisor should invite him to a conversation. An opening gambit may go something like this: *Can I share with you a couple of things I've noticed? (The supervisor states specific observations.) It might just be me, but I get a sense you were more engaged and motivated last year than this.*

"The trick here is to speak for oneself," says Phin. "Notice that there was no suggestion Dave was unmotivated, but only that the supervisor observed certain behaviors."

A follow-up question can invite Dave to share any hidden issues:

Is there anything going on here that's causing this change in behavior?

Dave may reveal a personal problem such as a health issue, a divorce, or some home event he normally would not share at work.

Expressing an understanding of how the problem could unsettle things might be all the supervisor needs to say for Dave to adjust his behavior. Perhaps he did not even realize his performance had deteriorated. And management might want to give him some slack until his personal issues are resolved.

Dave, however, may respond in a different way: He may state that something in the workplace is bothering him. If so, it is important to resolve the conflict.

at the typical business are fully engaged, which means giving their best efforts or working to their full potential. Fully 13 percent are "actively disengaged," which means they are miserable in their duties and spreading unhappiness to coworkers – and, presumably, customers. Perhaps as alarming was Gallup's finding that 51 percent of employees are "not engaged" – psychologically unattached and just "going through the motions." In other words, a majority of employees are not pulling their weight.

The best way to assess employee engagement is to speak with them one-on-one.

"Periodic conversations with employees will reveal any issues about their working conditions," says Rothwell. "The business environment is one thing, but how people perceive it and feel about it is very often another."

Here, the supervisor plays a key role, according to Tosh.

"Effective supervisors are catalysts," he says. "They impact and utilize employee talents to achieve business goals."

It's the frequent touch points of supervisor and employee, he adds, that offers the greatest potential.

"Each interaction, even momentary, is an opportunity to build the relationship, to coach, and to improve the employee's performance," Tosh says.

Unfortunately, too many supervisors see worker interactions as interruptions rather than opportunities, according to experts. Other times, the personalities of supervisors clash with their charges. And that can be a major demotivator.

"An employee's perception of their relationship with their manager is far more important than their perception of the organization as a whole," says Tosh.

Bonus tip: Engage the cynics. What to do with that subset of employees that always seem to have a negative interpretation of workplace events? Harness their energies.

"Sometimes your cynics are your best critics," says Bob Verchota, senior consultant at RPVerchota & Associates in Minneapolis. "Make a focus group out of them. Then you can really work on removing barriers to efficient employee performance."

Top Motivators

Supervisors can use motivational techniques to re-engage workers and keep everyone performing at an elevated level. But what techniques will work?

While the common wisdom says throwing more money at people



“A recent Gallup survey shows that engaged employees drive 12 percent more profit. They are far more productive and lead to higher customer satisfaction.”

– Pete Tosh, founder of The Focus Group

will stimulate performance, studies have shown that not to be true, according to experts.

“When people are paid more, their performance does increase temporarily, but then it goes right back down,” says Jack Altschuler, president of Fully Alive Leadership in Northbrook, Ill. “And they then view higher pay as an entitlement.”

Money, then, does little to inspire great workers. But Altschuler offers three caveats.

“For lower-wage people in financial distress, more money does matter and can change their engagement level,” he says. “Additionally, people who feel they’re being underpaid will respond positively to increased financial reward.”

Finally, at the lower end of the wage distribution scale, money can determine who applies for a job and who stays on once they’re hired, says Altschuler, adding, “If somebody is paid \$7.25 an hour, and they can get \$12 someplace else, they’re gone.”

Those exceptions aside, what really motivates people is a nurturing workplace that meets their basic human needs, according



“There is a difference between motivation and engagement. Motivation is internal to people while engagement is a passion for what they do. Engagement requires a match between the person’s passions and their daily work activities.”

– William J. Rothwell, professor of workforce education and development at Pennsylvania State University

to Altschuler. And to establish such an environment, experts suggest supervisors do the following:

- Appreciate employee contributions. “The No. 1 thing employers can do to drive employee engagement is show appreciation,” says Altschuler. “Very often, doing so is no more complicated than something like this: ‘Mary, thanks so much for staying late to finish the report that we needed this morning.’”

- Recognize achievements. “When we do something worthy of recognition, we want to be recognized,” says Altschuler. “Whether it’s a celebratory *yahoo party* or a plaque that someone can hang on their office wall, recognition creates a sense of personal pride.”

- Provide autonomy. Anything a manager can do to cut back on stifling bureaucracy is a good thing. “People need some personal freedom in their work practices,” says Verchota. “They need to feel that achieving an outcome is important, but how they get there is something they get to decide.”

- Encourage new skills. “People need to feel they have become masters at some task,” Verchota says. Increasing the number of such tasks can make an employee feel great about the workplace.

- Cut checkpoints and paperwork. “Bureaucracy demotivates people by creating obstacles to their job performance,” says Rothwell. “It makes people very angry if they need to sit around waiting for their boss’s approval to do routine and simple things.”

- Emphasize larger goals. “People need to feel a sense of purpose,” says Verchota. “They need to feel an emotional connection with their work and that their duties align with their value set.”

Hidden Motivators

As important as the top motivators are, one size does not fit all, experts emphasize.

“Not everyone is motivated by the same thing,” says Verchota. And the only way to discover what those idiosyncratic motivators are is to engage each employee in conversation.

Experts say supervisors should ferret out each employee’s hidden motivators in brief weekly meetings. Discuss the individual’s attitude toward his or her work, and their happiness with their position.

Rothwell suggests one particularly useful question: *Can you tell me a story about a time when you felt particularly motivated in the work that you were doing? What was happening, who was involved and most importantly, what made it so motivating to you?*

Then listen.

“The story will come from inside the person,” he says, “And most of the time if they can’t come up with a story, there is something overwhelmingly bad in their work situation that needs addressed.”

Another tactic is to assure the confluence of so-called Objectives and Key Results (OKRs).

“If a boss thinks an employee should be doing one thing, and that person thinks they should be doing something else, there’s going to be demotivation at some point,” says Don Phin, a management consultant in Coronado, Calif. He suggests having the employee write down the three most important tasks they do



every day, then the three key results they expect. Then have the supervisor do the same for that employee.

“It’s surprising how often the two lists do not match,” says Phin. “And no performance system will work if they don’t.”

A cousin to periodic engagement reviews are so-called pulse surveys. These are frequent, short questionnaires designed to spot trouble spots in a business environment. As the name implies, they take the pulse of the organization.

Creating Profits

Companies that fail to improve employee motivation and engagement leave money on the table that competitors are only too happy to collect. On the other hand, companies that make a concerted effort to inspire their personnel achieve the twin rewards of higher productivity and greater profitability, according to Tosh.

“Initiatives to bolster employee attitudes are proven to work,” he says. “Such efforts are practical, do-able, and drive success in the organization.”

The right program will retain the best people and attract new ones.

“If we want to be an employer of choice, we must understand we are in a major competition globally for top talent,” says Rothwell. “That means we need to create a great work environment where people can do their best and never want to leave.” **RVP**



“If a boss thinks an employee should be doing one thing, and that person thinks they should be doing something else, there’s going to be demotivation at some point.”

– Don Phin, management consultant

QUIZ: Does Your Workplace Engage?

Does your workplace inspire employees to become engaged with your business mission? Find out by taking this quiz.

Score 10 points for each “yes” answer. Then, total your score and check your rating at the bottom of the chart.

Do your managers and supervisors:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Convey appreciation for employee contributions? | <input type="checkbox"/> Interact productively with charges throughout the day? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recognize employee achievements? | <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss engagement issues with charges weekly? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provide autonomy to employees? | <input type="checkbox"/> Identify hidden motivators for each employee? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage mastery of skills? | <input type="checkbox"/> Run periodic checks for objectives and key results (OKRs)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce bureaucracy whenever possible? | <input type="checkbox"/> Emphasize purpose in the company mission? |

What’s your score?

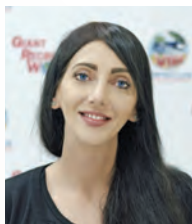
80 or more: Congratulations. You have gone a long way toward building a productive workplace.

Between 60 and 80: It’s time to fine tune supervisor-employee relations.

Below 60: Your business is at risk. Take action on the suggestions in the accompanying story.

Aligning Sales and Marketing

A Unique Service Level Agreement is a commitment between sales and marketing to support each other and work toward cumulative objectives.



By Kristina Shrider

Kristina Shrider holds a neuromarketing degree and has more than 16 years of experience in marketing and advertising. For more than two years, Shrider has served as the head of marketing at Giant Recreation World and is an active member of RVDA Young Executives. Shrider recently founded RVEM Mastermind, where her strategies continue to disrupt the traditional sales and marketing platforms.

“The sales and marketing departments must be on the same team.”

The statement above does sound good.

In theory, both teams should work together. After all, they have the same goal – to turn their skills into profit. However, that is not the vibe at the majority of dealerships today. Unfortunately, sales and marketing alignment stats reveal the ugly truth – there’s a huge gap between these teams.

According to research from Salesforce, 87 percent of the terms sales and marketing have for each other are negative. These two teams have typically misinterpreted each other, and there are usually misunderstandings about each department’s obligation. Perhaps sales and marketing even feel bitterness towards each other in some dealerships.

Only 8 percent of all companies believe they have a strong alignment between sales and marketing teams, according to research from Salesforce. Companies that can’t align their teams are two times more likely to report sales and marketing budget cuts. And the lack of coordination between sales and marketing teams could lead to some severe losses for your company.

Most dealer principals or owners do see the disconnect and have tried to fight the resistance of both departments but couldn’t afford the distraction that usually affects short-term goals and leaves the conflict unresolved. That leaves them with the unanswered question, “Where do I start?”

The good news is that “Where do I start?” is the right question. The cross-departmental alignment is a long-term strategy that must start somewhere.

One of the most reliable methods to get started is to get sales and marketing on the same page by developing a dealership’s tailored Unique Service Level Agreement, or “USLA.”

USLA is a pact between sales and marketing that describes the marketing objective (such

as a variety of leads or revenue pipeline) and the sales activity (such as following up with leads produced by marketing) that each team devotes to support the other.

The USLA should be the outcome of the two departments collaborating and identifying the cumulative objectives.

This concept is like the Service Level Agreements typically made between clients and businesses – applying that unique document internally between marketing and sales departments, resulting in an effective tool for lining up expectations and objectives.

So, let’s break down the four steps for creating a Unique Service Level Agreement between sales and marketing.

1 Calculating Marketing Goals

The pressure of striking quotas and revenue goals is mainly laid on sales departments. Marketeers could soak up some of those responsibilities. That’s why USLA’s step No. 1 needs to set up a target for the number of leads the marketing department needs to produce to support the sales team’s goals.

These calculations will reveal to you the number of leads your marketing department is required to produce every month based upon your revenue goals and will assist you in tracking marketing-generated revenue over time. The main point here is that these numbers make the marketing department accountable and show the value they contribute.

To determine the marketing side of your USLA, you’ll require the four metrics:

- Total sales goal in terms of revenue (A)
- Percent of revenue that comes from marketing vs. sales-generated leads (B)
- Average sales deal size (C)
- Average lead-to-customer close rate (D)

Tip: Resources for collecting this info include your DMS, CRM and other marketing automation/lead generation platforms.

Now it's time to do some calculations:

Calculation 1: $A \times B = \text{Goal for Marketing-Sourced Revenue}$

Calculation 2: $\text{Goal for Marketing-Sourced Revenue} \div C = \text{Number of Customers Needed}$

Calculation 3: $\text{Number of Customers Needed} \div D = \text{Number of Leads Needed}$

Note: Based upon the calculations above, the marketing side of your USLA equals the number of leads needed.

Don't forget to recalculate your USLA on a regular basis. Many factors can change your calculations' values, which is unique to each dealership, so create a spreadsheet that tracks your monthly calculations. To evaluate the marketing USLA over time, you'll want to track:

- The number of marketing-generated leads
- The number of those leads that became new customers
- The number of those leads that became new opportunities with existing customers (if retention or first-party database marketing is part of the ongoing strategy)
- Revenue from those closed customers
- Total revenue closed each month from all marketing-generated leads
- Total revenue closed each month across the business

Tip: Consider the sales cycle timeline.

Keep in mind an RV's longer sales cycle can affect your conversion numbers. So, make sure to identify the proper timeline for your reporting according to current and historical data.

I have worked with some dealerships that run these reports yearly or quarterly, whichever works for them. It just requires setting up your timeline differently, as USLA should be unique for every business. So, the world is your oyster. Make sure you use the same time period to calculate the USLA's sales side.

Also, keep in mind that not all leads are created equal. Some are of higher quality than others, and you may consider running separate calculations for each lead category at your dealership.

2 Create Goals for Sales Follow-Up

Now, let's take a look at the sales team's accountability. Many have heard concerns from the marketing teams. Because marketers feel their sales teams aren't following up on their hard-earned leads, they are typically annoyed and discouraged. That's why the sales side of the USLA is everything about the speed and depth of the follow-up on marketing-generated leads.



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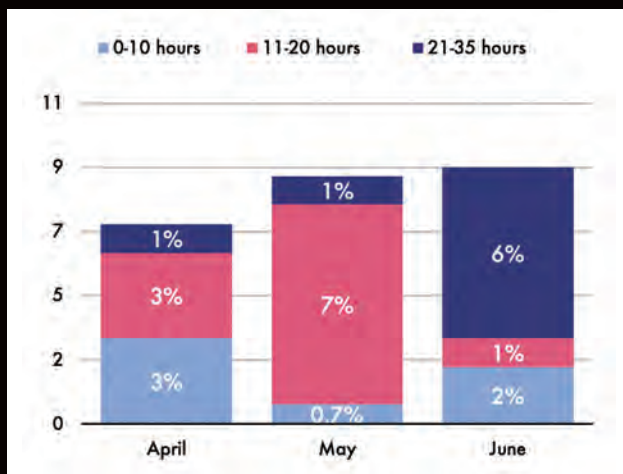


Figure 1

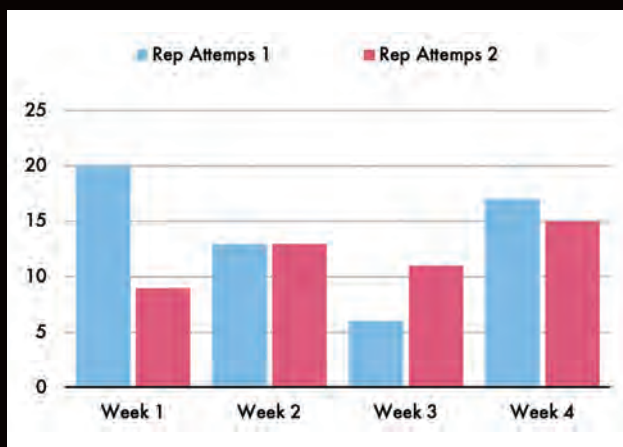


Figure 2

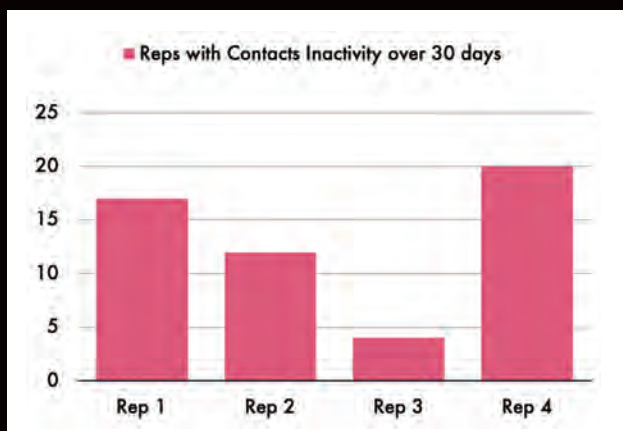


Figure 3

“The pressure of striking quotas and revenue goals is mainly laid on sales departments. Marketeers could soak up some of those responsibilities. That’s why USLA’s step No. 1 needs to set up a target for the number of leads the marketing department needs to produce to support the sales team’s goals.”

The ideal time for following up with leads can differ from dealership to dealership; let’s look at the following standards from the Lead Response Management Research study. That is a terrific place to begin.

There are two important qualifiers here:

First, online leads get cold very fast. If leads are responded to in less than five minutes, the odds of contacting them are 100 times higher than waiting 30 minutes. And every hour after that lowers the opportunity of converting or engaging with the lead.

Second, it’s still worth making repeated efforts to contact a lead – to a point. The recommended number of follow-up calls is between six and nine calls. By making six to nine attempts, you get 90 percent value out of the lead.

Keep these stats in mind as you establish goals for how rapidly and thoroughly your sales team needs to react to goals. Today, potential customers progressively anticipate discovering what they’re trying to find quickly, so the magic window of when follow-up calls are the most effective is expected to get tighter.

A goal may be for the sales team to follow up with 10 percent of the leads in five minutes, 50 percent in two hours, 80 percent in one day and 100 percent in three days. Another goal may be to make a minimum of four efforts to contact every lead.

Tip: Consider the sales group’s bandwidth. Sales reps usually get leads from other sources besides marketing, so it is necessary to identify each sales representative’s ability to deal with the lead volume. Consider the variety of leads they get along with the quantity of time they invest in each kind of lead. You might want to think about automating a few of the lead follow-up and nurturing processes, specifically when it concerns email.

3 Set Up Marketing USLA Reporting

For the USLA to be effective, you’ll need to track your progress toward your goals. My suggestion would be to create a graph that charts goals against actual results.

Start by creating your goal line. Use this calculation:

$(1 \div \text{Number of Days in the Month}) \times \text{Monthly Goal} = \text{Portion of Monthly Goal You Need to Achieve Every Day.}$

Chart your cumulative number of leads each day through the month, and you will see if you’re on track or need to generate more leads.

4 Set Up Sales USLA Reporting

Now let’s look at the sales-side reporting. The speed and amount of sales follow-up efforts are best presented with two separate charts. To chart the speed of follow-up, you’ll be required to discover the distinction between the date/time the lead was given to sales and the date/time the lead got its very first follow-up. The distinction between those two times equates to the time it took for sales to follow up with that specific lead.

Take an average of the monthly leads (or another timeframe) and chart the average response times to show what portion of leads are being contacted within which different lengths of time (see

The goal of the USLA is to produce transparency and responsibility in both the sales and marketing departments.

Figure 1 on page 110 as an example). Is your sales team making their follow-up speed goals?

To chart the number of follow-up attempts, track first attempts and second attempts as separate activities (see Figure 2 on page 110 as an example).

Create a chart that displays current contacts with inactivity over the last week or month, broken out by rep (see Figure 3 on page 110 as an example). This breaks down who is letting leads go stale or isn't logging their follow-up activity properly.

Is your sales team making its goals?

Conclusive Evaluate & Collaborate

5 The goal of the USLA is to produce transparency and responsibility in both the sales and marketing departments. Another objective of the USLA is to promote interaction. The

sales and marketing teams must fulfill monthly all of these metrics together to examine and keep an eye on development.

The last stage of producing the USLA is *accountability* and to identify ahead of time what the repercussions will be if either side's goals are not fulfilled. In an external service agreement between a customer and a business, a failure of the business to meet requirements can lead to the company paying service credits to the client.

So, it's just common sense for your sales/marketing USLA to develop a plan for how to comprise lost revenue from the unreached sales quota, based upon the particular objectives you developed for sales and marketing.

Make certain that both teams have access to all of the reports and utilize the regular monthly evaluation conferences to address issues. Do not forget to praise each other on successes too. With the USLA, the outcomes will be undeniable!

Sales reps and marketers are the main drivers for your company's growth. Still, they could be the reason for its possible downfall. Trust me, you'll achieve more significant results if both are in alignment.

In conclusion, align your departments – it's good for your business! *RVP*



The Case for Flat-Rate Pay

Flat-rate pay rewards efficiency or productivity while promoting quick service and shorter cycle times (RECT) for repairs, which translates to happier customers.



By Chuck Marzahn

Chuck Marzahn moderates virtual 20 Groups for RV dealers in the U.S. and Canada. He can be reached for comment and questions at Chuck@RV-VDG.com.

Many times, while working with dealerships, I am drawn into a discussion about compensation for employees.

One of the more frequent of those discussions is about flat-rate pay for technicians. In fact, at a 20 Group meeting some time ago, it became clear there were two distinct sides. One part of the group was in favor of paying technicians based on performance and the other members were opposed to it.

That was several years ago. Now I see more dealers moving to a flat rate. What follows is a discussion of the principles of flat-rate compensation, the reasons why it works now when it didn't seem to a few years ago and, finally, a look at the facts and fiction regarding most dealer's understanding of flat rate.

Flat-rate pay has its roots in automotive shops. The history comes from a time when small shop owners shared the labor produced with that technician. In those days, it was common for them to split labor charges half and half between the shop owner and the tech.

As the shops grew and became associated with dealerships, they found that, with the larger investment in the facility and equipment, they could not remain profitable with the old 50-50 split. The average cost was limited to approximately 35 percent to allow the shop to make a profit. That ratio applies today. I regularly see a cost of labor in shops running as low as 30 percent of labor revenue.

Among the factors that determine that gross profit margin or cost, depending on which side of the calculation you are considering, are technician efficiency, labor mix and differing labor rates for internal versus external labor. Certainly, if the techs are being paid for two hours to bill a single hour to the customer, there will be a higher cost of sale.

Think of it this way. If you pay a tech \$18 an hour and the tech takes two hours to accomplish the work enabling a billing to the customer of one hour, you just paid \$36

for that hour billed. And you may have been lost in the mistaken comfort thinking your rate for the tech is \$18.

Similarly, the internal rate, if it is discounted, will change the margin. (Margin is determined by subtracting cost from revenue.) Less revenue against the same cost yields a smaller margin.

Matching Up Cost & Revenue

The underpinning principle of the flat-rate pay system is that it is entirely "variable." When the shop makes money, so does the technician. It is a plan that specifically rewards the tech for doing a good job. Those are a couple of good points.

One of the reasons I like it is because the cost and the revenue event are always matched up. If you consider the cost of sale in the shop to be the technician's productive wage, it really makes sense.

Others in the industry consider the tech wages as an expense. Knowing generally accepted accounting practices in dealership accounting, I have always considered the tech's productive wage as cost of sale. The business model is very simple: The shop buys the tech's time; stores it on the work order (as work in process/inventory) and finally sells it to a customer at a profit.

You may use one of those more convoluted plans that pay techs differently based on certain transactions or types of customers. Some even pay techs a different amount for the same work based on who is paying the bill. Most techs I know don't differentiate that way. For them, it is simple: "I did the work and I deserve to be paid." It doesn't matter to them who "pays".

Not only does flat rate reward efficiency or productivity, but it also promotes quick service and shorter cycle times (RECT) for repairs, which translates to happier customers. Flat rate reinforces quality, too.



“Flat rate rewards good performance. The converse of that is that it tends to penalize weak performers.”



If you pay a tech to do something and it isn't done correctly, the tech isn't paid to do it over. That's the best response to those who think flat rate encourages shortcuts and lower quality. If anything, quality and increased production are encouraged. I suspect that the quality issue doesn't stem from the pay plan in the first place. That is, unless you consider that you may get lower quality from lower-paid techs.

I would also add that the same arguments might be made on lines with the OEMs. Are we paying piecework there? Are we getting the results we desire? I will always lean toward paying for results rather than attendance.

Arguments Against Flat Rate Fall Flat

Flat rate is really simple. Shops, or the bosses, tend to make it hard. There are many weak arguments against an incentive-based tech pay plan. The most common is that it causes techs to “cheat” by overstating the times they charge. In the first place, that argument speaks more to ethics and morals than the structure of the compensation. Someone who is cheating a customer is also very likely cheating you.

Secondly, I'd hasten to point out that the techs should not be allowed to set the times they are charging. Those should be standard times that each customer is routinely billed for a specific task.

Just about everyone now understands how to bill using flat rate. Warranty billings have been done that way for decades. Internal charges are set up as “flat” charges to the sales department. Customer work should also be billed that way and the tech should

be compensated for the number of hours that are billed to either the customer, warranty or internal work orders.

The thought of implementing a flat-rate pay system is gaining respect. For one reason, dealers have been charging for labor using flat rate for years now. It's really not a “big deal” anymore. Given that we already charge based on flat rate, it's a shorter step to pay using flat rate. Doing so has allowed shops to estimate the charges for work without having to wait until the job is done to see what the price is.

A common argument is that the flat-rate book doesn't cover all the different operations on an RV. What you might not know is that it doesn't cover all the operations on a car, either. In those cases, they make an educated guess, give a quote to the customer and live by it when the job is done. If they were wrong, they will guess better the next time.

It's better to consider the automotive body shop as a closer parallel. In those shops, the estimate frequently becomes the flat rate for the job in the manner just described. After you've done the

same job a few times, you will naturally settle on a market sensitive and consistent amount to charge for routine jobs.

There are, notably, two exceptions. Those are electrical troubleshooting (wiring) and water leaks. They are pure troubleshooting. The repair itself is usually very straightforward when the diagnosis is complete. But those two tasks must be quoted as “time and materials.”

Flat-rate billing makes it easier to do business with the customer. If you quote flat rate incorrectly on a job, you learn from it and move on. As mentioned earlier, you honor the estimate with the customer. Just adjust the charge for the next time.

You will quickly settle into a distinct set of flat-rate billing that you can maintain in your own dealership flat-rate manual. You’ll find that warranty has its own. Any work for the sales department is done with just a handful of reiterative jobs. Each billing to sales has its own amount based on agreement between the sales department and service.

Those two categories, warranty and internal, will take care of most of the line on work orders. The customer bill codes will likely not number more than a hundred specific job codes. It’s easier than most people think to maintain that list.

One of the reasons that flat rate is taking off in popularity is

because you can hire a better tech if you can be assured that you can get what you pay for. Consider this: Many shops approach a labor rate of \$150 per billed hour these days. If you could know that the cost (tech’s pay) was tied directly to the customer’s charges, you could pay a tech (on average) \$35 to \$45 per hour. What sort of tech could you hire at that rate these days?

The more common dealer pays a tech who is 50 percent productive \$18. Because of the efficiency, the dealer is already paying \$36 for each billed hour. The result is the same from a cost standpoint. But think about the difference in the speed and quality of work done. Think about the quality of tech and the number of techs you might hire using that pay basis.

If you are making a transition from straight-time wages to flat-rate commission, my advice is that you get some help to think things through. It may be that you would lose a tech or two. In most cases, they are the ones who should have been “lost” some time ago.

Flat rate rewards good performance. The converse of that is that it tends to penalize weak performers. If the shop gets paid for what it does, so does the tech. In many cases, flat rate points out vividly what everyone already knows – those certain techs who have been riding the clock for way too long. **RV**



‘Well, the Computer Says We Have One!’

There are strategies retail operations can employ to minimize the risk of being caught shorthanded on parts and accessories that customers desire.



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.

While passing through the parts department, do you frequently (or even occasionally) hear a version of this phrase: “Well, the computer says we have one!”

When a parts associate is heard uttering this while interacting with an external or internal customer, it usually indicates an apparent discrepancy between the amount of an item actually available and the amount of that same item shown in the computer system (DMS). These apparent on-hand quantity discrepancies impact the operations of your RV business in several ways, which include but are not limited to:

- A dissatisfied customer who might have driven to your location specifically to obtain the item
- The delayed completion of a service maintenance or repair, which negatively impacts your customer’s impression of your operations
- Extra efforts by parts associates to search for this missing item
- The posting of an inventory adjustment to the DMS to correct the on-hand quantity, and
- Communication with the accounting department to report the value of the inventory adjustment so that it can be posted to the general ledger.

Each of these factors impacts the profitability of your business, so if you could minimize or eliminate the opportunity for quantity discrepancies in your parts and accessory department, it could improve the net profits and enhance the customer service for your RV business. Read on to learn of some methods to improve the accuracy of your parts and accessory inventories.

Continuous Cycle Counting

The quote “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty” is attributed to Major General James Jackson. We could paraphrase this statement

with regard to the accuracy of an inventory: *eternal vigilance is the price of an accurate inventory.*

The eternal vigilance in this case takes the form of continuous cycle counting of your parts and accessories inventories. Yes, this will require some effort to process these continuous checks on the accuracy of your parts and accessories inventories. However, there are some cycle-counting routines that can be incorporated with other inventory processes and which could minimize those efforts.

The *Price & Availability Cycle Count* might already be in place at your RV business, and you might not be aware of it. Most professional parts associates perform this cycle count when processing a request for an item. These are the steps to the *Price & Availability Cycle Count*:

1. The item is researched to determine the part number
2. The part number is entered into the computer to determine the price, the availability and the bin location
3. The parts associate goes to the bin location to retrieve the item
4. For items with fewer than six on-hand, the parts associate visually confirms the actual quantity and makes a note if that actual quantity doesn’t match the computer quantity
5. For any apparent quantity discrepancy, the parts associate reports this to the parts manager.

This is a cycle count that is incorporated with an existing parts transaction, and which could already be occurring in your business, yet without a formal process. I suggest that you meet with your parts manager to determine if this is happening. If it is, I also suggest that you direct him to develop a detailed written procedure so that this *price & availability cycle count* is documented and is consistently performed by every parts associate.



“If you are interested in accurate and equivalent values for your parts and accessory inventories, then I suggest that you consider the eternal vigilance implied by a continuous cycle counting and reconciliation system.”

Another cycle count process that could be performed in conjunction with an existing inventory department process is the *stock-order cycle count*. Assuming your parts manager submits regular replenishment orders for some of your goods, she could spot-check 10 percent of the stock items being considered for replenishment. For a 100-line order, this amounts to only 10 items, which could be counted in a few minutes. This *stock-order cycle count* has two benefits, which are:

- That the actual on-hand quantity is confirmed prior to placing the order, which could eliminate the chance that too much or too little of the item will be ordered
- That any on-hand quantity discrepancy can be corrected.

These two dual-function cycle counts relate to items that experience recurring demands. What of those items that have not incurred a demand in more than a year? The *phase-out cycle count* could be applied in this instance.

Many DMS (computer systems) provide a feature to identify those items that have not incurred a demand in a specified period and that have zero on-hand and zero on-order. Those items that qualify for these conditions can be automatically purged from the database.

However, before processing the purge, your parts manager should provide her parts associates with a report of these part

numbers and direct them to verify that the on-hand quantity is zero. For any items that have an on-hand quantity greater than zero, they should be recorded on the report and then adjusted to the correct value.

There are other “two-for-the-price-of-one” cycle count processes that could be applied. However, I have a limit on the quantity of words that can be included in this column, so we should visit another aspect of the cycle count processes that is also important: The reporting of any inventory adjustments to the accounting department.

The Count & the Amount

Your parts manager is most likely interested in maintaining the correct physical count of the goods in his parts and accessory inventories, which is why we have offered these three dual-purpose cycle counts.

However, there is another manager who is interested in the fiscal amount of the parts and accessory inventories, so it is very important that the parts manager coordinate with the accounting manager to report inventory adjustments. I suggest that you schedule a meeting with the accounting manager and the parts manager to develop a procedure for reporting and recording any inventory adjustments to the appropriate general ledger account(s).

There are many variables that impact the parts department value of the inventory and the accounting department value of the inventory. If these variables are not identified and are not understood by both the accounting manager and the parts manager, then there could be a finger-pointing issue when closing the books at year-end.

During my career as a parts manager/director, I was involved with some of these *He Said-She Said* conversations as they related to whose value of the parts and accessory inventories was correct. So, to eliminate assigning blame (and because I disliked performing full physical counts), I developed a program that coordinated the efforts of the accounting and parts managers to achieve accurate and equivalent values for the parts and accessory inventories. And, given that this was intended to be a cooperative effort, I named my program **P.A.I.R.S. (Parts & Accounting Inventory Reconciliation System)**.

P.A.I.R.S.: The Condensed Version

The objective for this process was an accurate and equivalent value for the parts and accessory inventories without having to perform an actual physical count of every item once each year. This was accomplished through the application of continuous cycle counting and the introduction of a monthly reconciliation of the parts and accounting values of the inventories.

Phase One: So that a verified, accurate value for the parts and accessory inventories is confirmed, a full physical inventory is scheduled. Also, substantial preparations are processed to ensure that both the accounting and parts values are in agreement. During the preparation period, processes related to the continuous cycle counting and to the monthly reconciliation of the accounting and

the parts values are developed and detailed written procedures are created for each of these processes.

Phase Two: The business is scheduled to be closed for two consecutive days to eliminate the possibility that any transactions will occur, which could impact the accuracy of the full physical counting process. After all counts have been posted, any variances between the on-hand quantity prior to and subsequent to the physical counting are researched and adjusted as necessary. The verified, equivalent values are posted to the accounting and to the parts department files.

Phase Three: Continuous cycle counts are performed daily in the parts department to maintain the accuracy of the on-hand quantities and any adjustments are reported to the accounting department. As part of the month-end processes, an inventory reconciliation form is completed by the parts manager and reviewed with the accounting manager to determine if both values of the parts and accessory inventories are equivalent within the allowed variance. Any exceptions are researched and adjustments are made to either or both the accounting value and the parts value.

This condensed account is an extremely minimal version of the 120 page P.A.I.R.S. manual. There are detailed steps in the three sections of the manual, which are:

1. Preparation for the verified physical count
2. Processing of the verified physical count
3. Maintaining and reconciling the values, which is the on-going aspect of P.A.I.R.S.

The benefits of implementing my P.A.I.R.S. in the dealerships where I worked were the elimination of the yearly physical, an inventory accuracy of 99.9 percent, and improved efficiency and profitability.

If you are interested in accurate and equivalent values for your parts and accessory inventories, then I suggest that you consider the eternal vigilance implied by a continuous cycle counting and reconciliation system. **RVP**

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Ten Takeaways from the Hershey Show

The Pennsylvania RV and Camping Association's successful show this year in the midst of COVID-19 carries some lessons.



By Bob Zagami

Bob Zagami has been writing, speaking and consulting in the RV industry since 1996. He is the principal consultant at RV Insights, a media, marketing and consulting company serving the RV and outdoor hospitality industries. He can be reached via email at rwzagami@gmail.com or by phone at 617-974-3739.

Editor's note: Bob Zagami spent several days attending "America's Largest RV Show" in Hershey, Pa., in mid-September. He came back with the several insights from the show, which are detailed here.

1 The prospects and customers are back! The Hershey Show has set the standard for consumer RV shows going forward. If we are honest with each other, nobody really knew what to expect when this show opened, but customers loved what took place in Hershey in September. Going forward, dealers should embrace their local RV shows and provide a showcase of ideas, technology and great RVs for all the new RVers adopting some aspect of

the RV lifestyle. The result: *their second-largest crowd in the history of this show.*

2 Class B and van campers are no longer a niche market – they are mainstream and enjoying great success. That's especially true with Millennials and Gen Z young adults and families. And the enhanced solar and lithium battery technology gets better and more affordable each year.

3 There appeared to be a larger selection of Super C motorhomes at Hershey. We may be seeing a shift to this product group – both from traditional Class C owners wanting something bigger and more powerful and Class A diesel pusher fans stepping down to something a bit smaller but just as luxurious.



Pictured here are some Grand Design models, just a few of the 1,200 RVs that were on display at the Hershey show.



If the Hershey show demonstrated anything, it's that Class B's and camper vans are no longer niche products.



4 The three-day pass offered at the Hershey show was very popular. The audience for this show spent a lot of time in the display area over several days. These are serious buyers, and they do their homework.

5 Camping World was not missed – despite its many radio and television ads, billboard advertisements and even an airplane banner in the sky throughout the show hoping to draw attendees to its Harrisburg locations with “we won’t be undersold” and “we’ll give you \$1,000 if we can’t beat your show deal” messaging. It did not detract from the success of the show.

6 There is always an incredible variety of parts, accessories and complementary products on display in Hershey. Campers Inn RV stepped up and took the space vacated by Camping World on the arena floor and maintained several displays just outside the Giant Center entrance. Consumers continue to “buy a lot of stuff” at this show.

7 Even though the manufacturers and suppliers have been challenged this year to supply all the inventory the dealers have ordered, they still managed to present several new products, new floorplans and increased the amount of new “technology” in their respective product offerings.



Several pop-ups and other lightweight trailers were on display at the show.



Show attendees pass by a Newmar New Aire motorhome.



Show attendees gather around an Entegra Super C – one of many such motorhomes on display at the show this year.



Fleetwood debuted its new Frontier motorhome at the Hershey show.



Newmar's Bay Star Sport was one of several entry-level Class A motorhomes on display.

8 Solar is going mainstream. A few years back it was an option, then the manufacturers started providing a pre-wired terminal for portable solar systems. Now we have solar panels as standard equipment on many RVs on display this year. The most talked-about new system at the show was Keystone's SolarFlex offerings.

9 I'm not sure I've ever been at a consumer RV show with such a diversity of attendees across all demographics from young adults to those enjoying the benefits of retirement – all of them wanting to do what they want to do from the comfort of an RV. I saw young couples just starting a family, and multi-generation families looking for an RV that would meet their camping needs. The success of our Go RVing marketing campaign was seen with the smiles on the faces of the attendees – RVs are hot, but we already knew that. They are about to get a lot hotter in the months and years ahead.

10 I want to congratulate Heather Leach, executive director of PRVCA, and her team, for the incredible work they did behind the scenes in a changing post-pandemic environment that caused many to question the success of a major consumer show as new variants of the COVID-19 virus and new local and national mandates caused others to cancel their plans – including the second year in a row where the industry cancelled the Elkhart Dealer Open House festivities. It only took about an hour to see that PRVCA's hard work paid off, and the public was banging on the door to enter the display area and see more than 1,200 RVs – putting COVID and all its challenges behind us and enjoying a great show produced by great people, many volunteers, manufacturers, suppliers, dealers and campgrounds ready to rock the RV world. And they did. **RV2**



Attendees flocked to vendor displays outside and on the arena floor.



The Hershey show offered something for everyone - from rugged travel trailers designed to be taken off road to luxury motorhomes.

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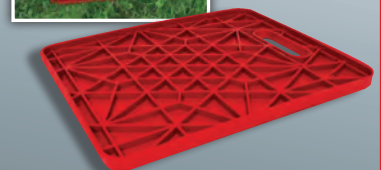
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News of Note

Reporting on the RV industry across North America

NTP-STAG and SeaWide Join Forces

SeaWide Marine, a North American marine products distributor, and NTP-STAG, a leading distributor of RV parts and accessories, are combining to service the marine industry under the SeaWide brand.

"This is extremely exciting for us and will enable SeaWide to expand our current business immensely," said **Mike Yarbro**, founder of SeaWide Distribution, adding that the combined resources will match up the largest related industry distribution network in



North America with the significant marine industry experience of the SeaWide team. "Our customers will have a major upgrade in delivery service level, product range, inventory breadth and depth, business

to business systems and tools, marketing resources and much more."

"We are really happy to have Mike and his team now working hand-in-hand with our existing associates to provide their leadership in the marine market and together provide customers and suppliers with a great source for all the outstanding products this growing industry has to offer," said **Bill Rogers**, president of Keystone/NTP-STAG.

As part of the transition, SeaWide will expand its delivery network by eight distribution centers and over 40 cross-docks, strategically located to deliver next-day service, primarily on its own trucks, to



the majority of North America. While SeaWide's focus will remain on marine

electronics, customers will have expanded product offerings including marine hardware, safety, furniture, cargo management, service and maintenance parts, marine accessories and extensive towing and trailering products through the NTP-STAG product portfolio.

"What a fantastic time to be in the marine business," said Yarbro. "We couldn't be more bullish about the future."

Duo Form, Specialty Rec Announce Partnership

Duo Form has tapped Specialty Recreation as its exclusive RV aftermarket distributor for all Duo Form RV aftermarket parts, supplies and accessories



throughout the U.S. and Canada. Duo Form prominently

serves the RV OEM industry with a variety of thermoformed products. Last year, the company expanded its RV parts offering to the growing RV aftermarket and has launched more than a dozen products designed and developed especially for existing RV owners wanting to repair, rehab or update and modernize their existing RV.

Specialty Recreation now has an exclusive agreement to distribute Duo Form's products to the RV aftermarket throughout the United States and Canada.

"This exclusive partnership will allow Duo Form to provide superior products and service throughout the entire RV market," said **Shelly Ditmer**, Duo Form's president. "Duo Form has been an industry leader in the OEM market for over 50 years, while Specialty Recreation has been an RV aftermarket leader for almost 40 years. With our industry continuing to grow



and the high demand for RV products, we feel this partnership is a critical step in ensuring quality customer service

throughout both the OEM and aftermarket industries."

Many customers have already benefited from the relationship between Duo Form and Specialty Recreation, as they have a history spanning 15 years, according to the companies.

"With RV wholesale shipments at historic highs and dealers breaking record sales, this new exclusive partnership solidifies our combined intentions of making sure the entire RV industry is provided with the quality parts and service they need, from the OEMs to the aftermarket," said Duo Product Development Manager **Dave Rheinheimer**. "By Duo Form handling the OEM side and Specialty Recreation handling the aftermarket side, we feel we can better service all our customers."



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News of Note



Days Corp. Rebrands as EQ United

Days Corp. has undergone a rebrand, and the company changed its name to EQ United. Founded in 1913, Days has explored many branches

of business over the years. While the company is no longer owned by a Days family member, late CEO **Jim Sproatt** had a vision to move the company toward what EQ United is today. Over his 54 years with the company, Sproatt led the company's continued growth and inspired the need for a refreshed brand identity.

Sproatt had the idea for Equalizer Leveling Systems in the early 1990s and it was met with resistance, according to the company, which said he used every resource he had to buy out the last partner and in 2008 became the sole majority owner. The company said he made his dream a reality and now it's a company that is stronger than ever.

Days Corp., Equalizer Systems and Days Distribution & Logistics have all been rebranded as follows:

- EQ United is now the corporate umbrella, formerly known as Days Corp.
- EQ Systems is what was known as Equalizer Systems.
- EQ Logistics is what was known as Days Distribution & Logistics.

EQ United's values and mission have not changed and remain true, the company said.



Ortiz

Airxcel Adds Ortiz to Marketing Team

Airxcel has expanded its marketing team again, hiring **Gabe Ortiz** as the group's second marketing coordinator.

Ortiz joins Airxcel in the newly formed position of marketing coordinator. In this role, Ortiz creates strategic marketing initiatives to drive brand awareness and product demand as the voice for Coleman-Mach, Maxxair and Cleer Vision Windows within the Airxcel marketing group. Ortiz joins **Leah Shaikin**, marketing coordinator for Suburban and Aqua-Hot, and **Keith Walker**, advertising and events manager, on Gorski's team.

"The additional marketing coordinator role allows us to better connect the brands to both the OEM and RV enthusiast," said **Chris Gorski**, Airxcel's director of marketing. "Gabe brings a skill set we can leverage in multiple areas of marketing. I'm excited for the way our team is growing and how Gabe's insights and experience will add to the dynamic skill set we now have in-house."

Ortiz comes to Airxcel with a history in marketing and artistic asset management. He was the marketing coordinator at Newmark Zimmer in Kansas City, Mo., before relocating in September 2021 to join the Airxcel marketing team based in Frederick, Colo. Ortiz holds a Bachelor of Arts in communication from the University of New Mexico.



Hershberger (left) and Ault

Way Interglobal Hires One, Promotes One

Way Interglobal has announced a promotion in its warranty department and a new customer service manager.

Betsy Hershberger has been promoted to warranty manager. Hershberger has been with Way for several months and has spent her time training and understanding product offerings. In her new role, Hershberger's responsibilities will include reviewing all warranty claims, providing final approvals, reviewing warranty costs, monitoring product failure trends and helping to expedite solutions to better Way products.

"We're thrilled to promote Betsy and know she will do an excellent job as our warranty manager," said **Wayne Kaylor**, CEO and founder of Way. "She has shown us what a dedicated and hardworking part of the Way team she has been over the

last several months. We know she will continue to grow with our company and be a great asset for our customers as we look to deliver the best possible customer experience."

Way is also adding to its customer service team with the addition of **Kayla Ault** as the new customer service manager. Ault was a customer service representative and then manager in her previous roles, overseeing the day-to-day service operations while improving processes and efficiencies.

"Way is always trying to improve our service levels and meet the needs of customers who put their trust in us," said Kaylor. "With the addition of Kayla Ault and Betsy's promotion, we continue to show that we're serious about bolstering our customer service to better meet the needs of our OEM, dealer and consumer RV customers."

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In Case You Missed it

Breaking news exclusives from RV PRO's website



Ember RV Details Plans

If not now, when?

"We've had people ask us, isn't this exactly the wrong time to start an RV company?" said **Chris Barth**, vice president and chief operating officer for the start-up RV manufacturer, Ember RV. "We have said again and again, together, 'When is the right time to start an RV company exactly? Do you wait for the market to be down? When is it?'"

"Yes, procurement is hard right now, but dealer inventory is very low and consumer demand is very high. If we're going to say the procurement is the main problem, one of the great things is, anybody who's able to run their business in kind of this new environment, and run it successfully, is a strong business and that's a great partner to have."

Launched early in 2021, Ember's founder and CEO comes with an impressive pedigree: **Ashley Bontrager Lehman** is the granddaughter of **Lloyd and Bertha Bontrager**, founders of Jayco.

Lehman, Barth and the other two co-founders, **Steve Delagrange and Ernie Miller**, all knew each other from having worked together at their previous company.

Upon hearing news of the start-up, reaction from the dealer community – many of whom know Bontrager from her previous company – has been overwhelmingly positive, Barth said.

"They're saying, 'This is fantastic to have a new option, we like the message that you're sending, the product that you're going after, the product segment you're going after is a really live, active, very vital part of the industry,'" he said. "It's bringing people into the RV lifestyle for the first time in these entry-level coaches."

Specifically, that product segment – at least to start – is the lightweight travel trailer market.

"Coming from the Bontrager family that started Jayco, my grandparents at that time wanted to provide a family-friendly unit that got families out in nature spending time together," Lehman said. "So, when this whole thing came about, I had a strong desire to do something similar to that idea of, let's provide more of an entry-level unit for families to go out and enjoy together. ..."

Read more: <http://rvpro.link/las1i>



Youngblood's Expands Its Outdoor Appeal

As brisk as RV sales have been, the management team at Youngblood's RV & Outdoor decided to try a new twist at one of its Midwestern stores: Selling outdoor lifestyle products they feel will appeal to people who like RVing.

In fact, the company recently added the "& Outdoor" part to its name and updated its logo to better represent its new direction.

"We've added outdoor furniture, kayaks, fire pits, grills, outdoor kitchens, patio umbrellas, any kind of camping furniture you could imagine," said **Chase Youngblood**, sales director for Youngblood's, established in 1977. "We just took on a new brand, called Structure. It's a pergola company – we build pergolas for people on their patios, over their outdoor kitchens, or pools, or whatever they have."

A pergola is an outdoor structure similar to a trellis that someone might install to encourage climbing plants. Though not RV-related in any way, it's the type of product that Youngblood's has discovered its customers are interested in.

"So, (we're) just kind of venturing more into the outdoor lifestyle side of things. The RV business is still really important to us – that's where we're going to hang our hats, but we just felt like in our area there was a lacking for those kinds of products, quality-wise," Youngblood said.

Read more: <https://rvpro.link/1q2j- RV2>



From left to right: Marketing Director Katie Beth McIntosh, Sales Director Chase Youngblood and Wes Williams are pictured in front of an outdoor kitchen the business retails.

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