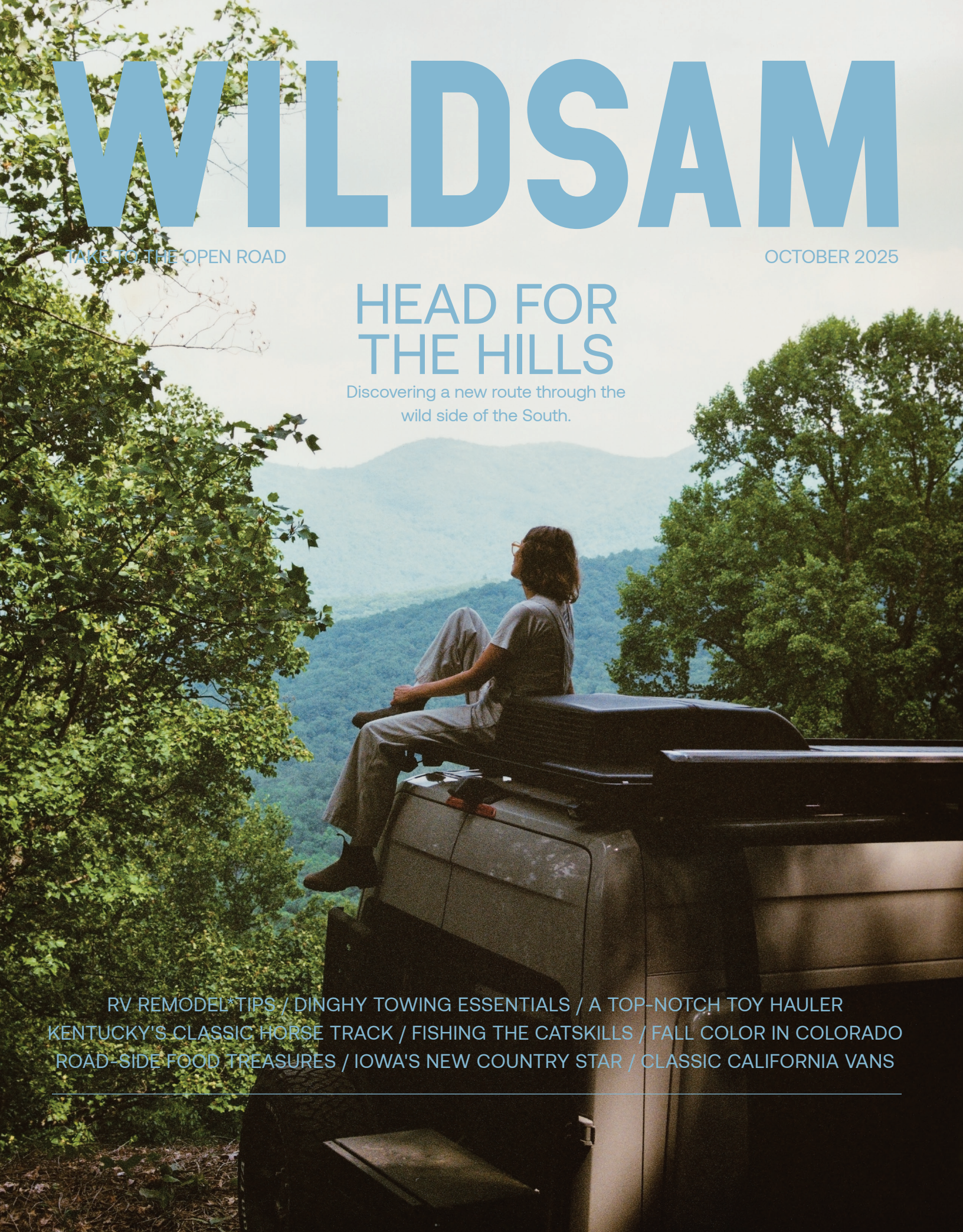
WILDSAM

TAKE TO THE OPEN ROAD

OCTOBER 2025

HEAD FOR THE HILLS

Discovering a new route through the wild side of the South.



RV REMODEL TIPS / DINGHY TOWING ESSENTIALS / A TOP-NOTCH TOY HAULER
KENTUCKY'S CLASSIC HORSE TRACK / FISHING THE CATSKILLS / FALL COLOR IN COLORADO
ROAD-SIDE FOOD TREASURES / IOWA'S NEW COUNTRY STAR / CLASSIC CALIFORNIA VANS

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WILDSAM X MAZDA ROAD TRIPS TO REMEMBER

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A Utah adventure through land, space and time.

In special parts of the great Southwest, you can see and feel the ages at work. The Capitol Reef country of Utah, where the red rock wrinkles and surges into moments of pure desert drama and unique geology—that's one. A cruise on Scenic Drive Road reveals eons of change, from the ancient sandstone of the Moenkopi Formation to the outlaw lore of Grand Wash. All around, the landscape calls for adventure with your most steadfast friends, from rugged trails for foot and wheel to a welcome splash in precious waters. Out here, you're out here.

mazda

Welcome to
UTAH

mazda

THE TERRITORY Capitol Reef National Park sits at the heart of southern Utah's desert wonderland, surrounded by wild country. The remote expanses of Beas Flat beckon campers with renowned vistas and wide-open spaces.

THE CULTURE It's all about exploration—the more vigorous, the better—in a region defined by desert pursuits. Mountain bikers set course for Middle Ranger Trail, near base camp town Torrey, ascending 3,000 feet through stunning canyons to reach the highlands.

KEY INTEL Hiking routes thread the land with almost infinite wayfinding, like classic Chimney Rock Loop: a bracing climb to huge views of Waterpocket Fold. Highway 24 traces the Fremont River, a clutch spot for fishing and the mellow two-mile pilgrimage to Hickman Natural Bridge.

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2025 Mazda CX-50 2.5 Turbo Premium Plus with available accessories and options shown. Please remember to properly secure all cargo. Carrying cargo, especially on the roof, will affect the vehicle's handling, braking and stability. Cargo and load capacity are limited by weight and distribution. Be careful not to overload your vehicle.

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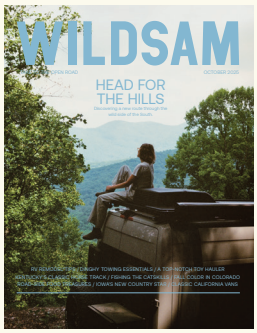
This time of year, Colorado really goes for gold.

ON THE COVER



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(FROM TOP) BEN WARD; MADELEINE HORDINSKI; HATTIE CLARK

BLUE OX

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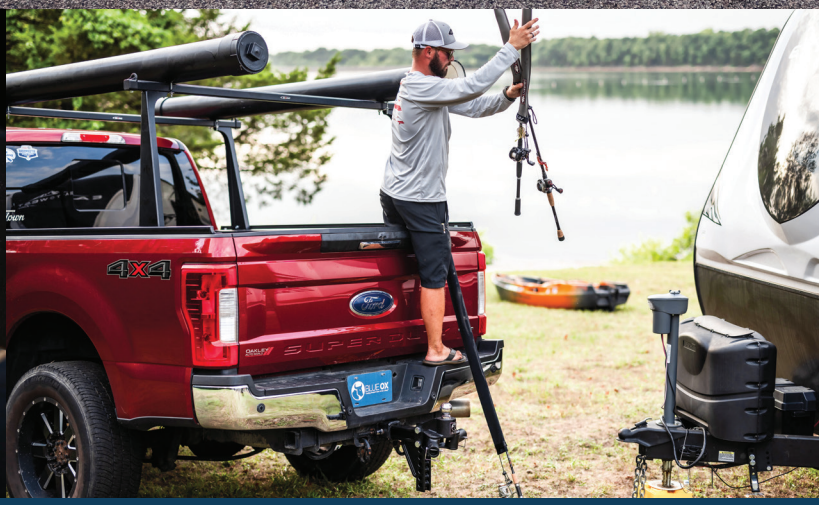

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Across the country, overlanding enthusiasts are devising new routes into the backcountry. This story explores the Georgia Traverse, a rugged ride through the Peach State's northern borderlands—and an invitation to ponder new ways to discover the wild.

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THE GREAT RV GLOW UP

Yes, RV travel is all about the great outdoors and wide-open road. But what about the living spaces packed into these vehicles? Dozens of fixes—easy to ambitious—can change your ride's look and feel for the better.

74

INTERSTATE LOVE SONG

All along our great freeway network, surprisingly great restaurants serve community and culture alongside rib-sticking road fuel. Let's pull over.

(FROM TOP) ETHAN GULLEY; CASSIDY ARAIZA; DLC DESIGN CO (@WHIMSICALWHEELS)

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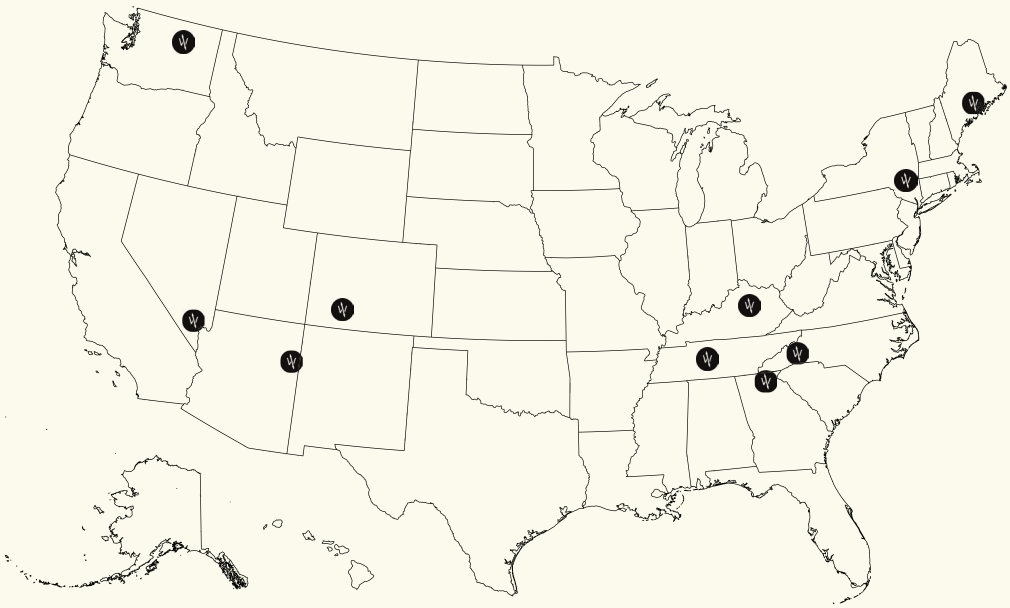
THERE AND BACK AGAIN

Where we've been this issue



WHAT'S THE MOST RUGGED, ROUGH OR OTHERWISE CHALLENGING ROAD YOU'VE NAVIGATED?

"The most challenging road I've traversed is Imogene Pass, a 4x4 route that links Ouray to Telluride. I did it twice with my sister on our annual journey to the bluegrass festival. For the years following, I happily took the more standard route from Ridgeway to Telluride. Last Dollar Road, a shortcut from Ridgeway to Telluride, was also pretty harrowing!"
–Samantha Alviani, Wildsam editor

"I once decided to drive from Sedona to meet with Highway 17 via Schnebly Hill Road. As I navigated past pink Jeeps with throngs of waving tourists, I realized I was on the white-knuckle, off-road route people pay experts to see. Navigating the massive boulders, ruts and deep washouts was worth it. The views of the red rocks were all mine, and I slept amongst the Ponderosa pines that night."
–Philip Jankoski, partnerships manager

Wildsam Magazine (ISSN 2994-7936) is published as 8 premium print issues and 4 digital themed editions, with print issues printed for January, Feb/Mar, April, May/Jun, July, Aug/Sep, October, and Nov/Dec, and 4 digital themed editions in March, June, September, and December by GS Media & Events (a division of Good Sam Enterprises, LLC), 2 Marriott Drive, Lincolnshire, IL 60069. Printed in the United States. Periodicals postage paid at Lincolnshire, IL 60069 and additional mailing offices. The annual subscription rate is $19.97 per year in the U.S. For Canadian and international subscriptions add $12 per year. US funds only. U.S. Postmaster: Send address changes to Wildsam Magazine, PO Box 5202, Boone, IA 50950-0202. Canadian Return Address: GS Media & Events, 4960-2 Walker Road, Windsor, Ontario N9A 6J3. Publication Sales Agreement #40012332. Printed in the United States. © 2024 Good Sam Enterprises, LLC. Unauthorized use of any of Good Sam's trademarks is expressly prohibited. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. All rights reserved. Privacy Promise: Wildsam Magazine will never intentionally share subscribers' names, addresses or other personal information with other companies when requested not to do so. If you do want to opt out from receiving marketing off ers in the mail from other reputable companies, or if you opt out and subsequently desire to opt back in, contact Wildsam Magazine by mail, phone or email: Wildsam Magazine Mail Preference Service PO Box 5202, Boone, IA 50950-0202., wildsam@cdsfulfillment.com. This policy applies to postal mail; Wildsam Magazine will not send commercial emails to subscribers unless authorized to do so. Editorial offices, 1224 East 12th Street, Austin, TX, 78702.

insure your investment

Do you really need RV insurance on your travel trailer?
As RVers, we know the allure of the open road and the freedom it offers. However, with freedom comes responsibility, including the important decision of securing insurance.

What is RV insurance?
RV insurance is designed to cover various types of RVs, including travel trailers, toy haulers, motor homes, fifth wheels, and camper vans. While liability insurance is not required for most travel trailers, having RV coverage could benefit you and your adventures.

How can RV insurance protect you?

- **Protection against accidents**: May provide financial protection for repair costs, medical expenses, and liability in case of an accident.
- **Coverage for theft and vandalism**: Could help with repairs or replace your trailer with less out-of-pocket expenses if it's lost or stolen.
- **Natural disasters and weather events**: May cover the cost of damage from storms, floods, or other natural disasters.

Is your travel trailer covered under your home or auto insurance?
While your home or auto policy can protect your trailer in certain instances, it can also leave you with gaps in your coverage.

For example, your auto policy may only cover your trailer while you're on the road, not if you're parked or at a campsite. The same goes for home insurance—if you're on your home's property it might be covered, but damage from a storm at a campground wouldn't be.

What specialized coverages does Progressive offer?
Progressive offers a variety of specialized coverages that aren't included on a standard auto insurance policy like:

- **Roof Protection Plus®**: Covers repairs or replacements for RV roofs, including if the cause is wear and tear.*
- **Pest Damage Protection℠**: Covers the cost of repairs from pest infestations.*

Confidence on the road
Having RV insurance gives you confidence you're protected no matter where you roam. From remote national parks to bustling campgrounds, RV insurance ensures you have the support and financial protection you need if something goes wrong.

While insurance for your travel trailer may not be legally required, it's a crucial investment in protecting your RV, finances, and peace of mind.

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DAVID COGGINS

Outdoors, p. 42

David Coggins is a regular contributor to numerous publications and writes the Substack newsletter T*he Contender*. His most recent book is *The Believer: A Year in the Fly Fishing Life* (Scribner). "As I got older, I realized that it's always a good time to fish somewhere in the world," he says. "At first that's very exciting, but it may be too much of a good thing." He has upcoming angling trips in Iceland, the Bahamas and Patagonia. *thecontender.substack.com*

DYLAN TUPPER RUPERT

On the Road, p. 46

Dylan Tupper Rupert is a writer, producer, and podcaster based in Los Angeles. She is the host of *Music Person*, a music interview podcast on the Talkhouse Network. Dylan previously co-created and hosted KCRW's critically acclaimed season of the podcast *Lost Notes* titled "Groupies: Women of the Sunset Strip from the Pill to Punk," and was the producer of *Bandsplain*. She has written for *Rolling Stone*, NPR, *Wildsam*, MTV News and more. For fun, she produces mini-music festivals in beautiful places such as Orcas Island, Washingtion and Ojai, California, called Dylanfest.

MADDIE HORDINSKI

Pilgrimage, p. 36

Madeleine Hordinski is a freelance photographer whose work explores themes of memory, land and the evolving identity of the Midwest. A regular contributor to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, she also teaches photography at the University of Cincinnati's School of Design. She holds dual degrees in photojournalism and anthropology from Ohio University. She photographed the legendary Keeneland horseracing track outside Lexington, Kentucky, capturing action during the track's Spring Meet so we could tell its story before the Fall Meet. "What struck me most at Keeneland was the sheer speed," she says. "The races were over almost before I could take them in. Paired with the bursts of color in the crowd, that pace pushed me to notice the smaller moments between the action. The energy lingered everywhere, steady and electric, guiding how I tried to photograph both the thrill of the races and the quieter magic of the day."

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CLOCKWISE: SPENCER WELLS (DAVID COGGINS); OSCAR MENDOZA (DYLAN RUPERT); MADELEINE HORDINSKI (MADELEINE HORDINSKI)

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From RV tech to the most interesting people and places out there, our sites have you covered.

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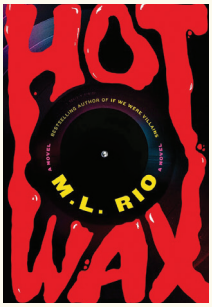
Stories from the open road

ICONIC ROAD-TRIP RIDES

Check out our top 10 all-time vehicles for journeys and adventures.



THE ROAD-TRIP BOOKS OF 2025

This year, American authors have really hit the highway. Find our favorites.

CHART YOUR COURSE

Lately we've dropped a series of quick-read, action-packed digital guides, ranging from Alaska to South Dakota to Northern California. Make some plans!

FIND GREAT ROAD FOOD

If you like this issue's feature on road-side food stops, check out wildsam.com's Food & Drink channel for many more discoveries.

RV.COM

Vehicles, gear and how-to

THE BEST RVS FOR BEGINNERS
Our list of the top motorhomes and travel trailers for newcomers to the RV lifestyle. These rigs ease the transition to RV camping, without sacrificing features.

SIX WHEELCHAIR-ACCESSIBLE RVS
Camping should be accessible and enjoyable to everyone, and these six RVs are built specifically with wheelchair-bound RVers in mind.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF A HEAT PUMP?
This handy gadget is quickly becoming a standard feature on RV air conditioners, but what does it do and how should you use it?

ALTERNATIVE USES FOR YOUR TOY HAULER'S GARAGE
Go beyond just hauling ATVs, motorcycles, and e-bikes with these suggestions of how to further utilize your toy hauler's garage space.

SHARE YOUR JOURNEY

Follow @wildsam on Instagram, and tag your travel images #wildsamopenroad to be featured.

DANIEL SHAPIRO

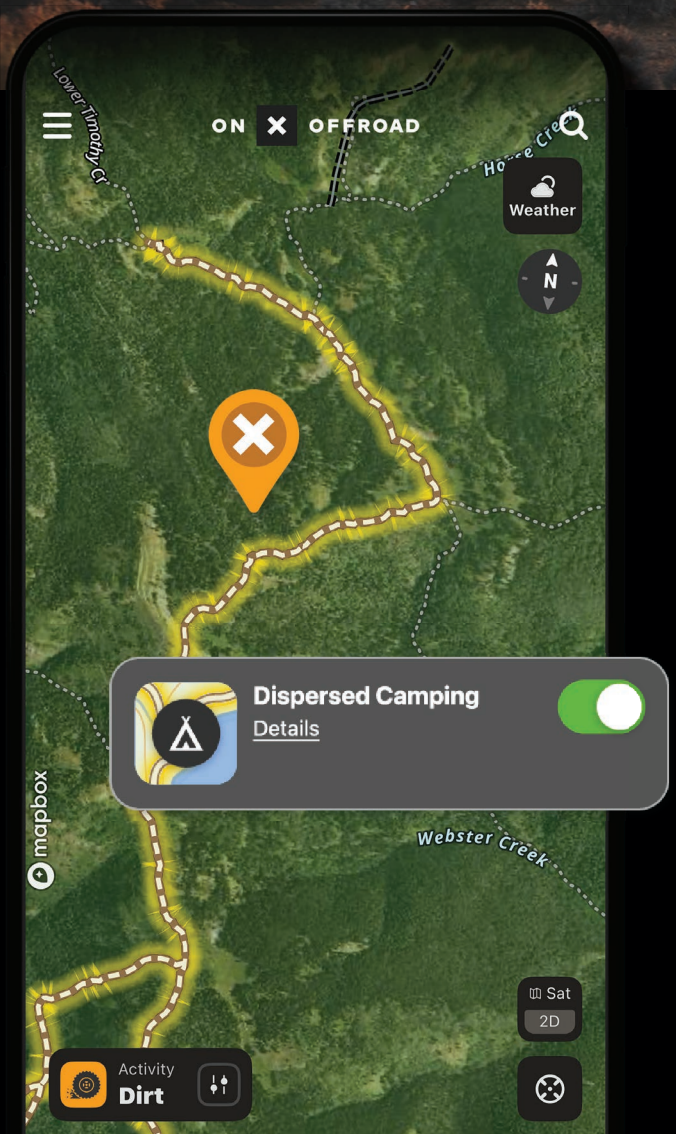
DOCUMERICA

MIKE FOX

FORD HERITAGE VAULT (ICONIC VEHICLES); SIMON & SCHUSTER (HOT WAX); ELIJAH HEITT (ALASKA); ALYSSA JANE (SEPTEMBER); RAMSES CERVENTES (FOOD); SEBASTIEN GOLDBERG (RV.COM)

ON X OFFROAD

DISPERSED CAMPING MAP LAYER



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TRY IT THIS WEEKEND

LETTER FROM THE ROAD

BY ZACH DUNDAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ZACH PUTNAM

"IT'S TRUE WHAT THEY SAY."

That phrase is deflating for us writer/editor types. We spend our lives trying to craft special new turns of phrase to express unique truths. But the more you get around, the more you learn that ... it is true, what they say. Most clichés capture something real and essential. That's how they become clichés!

They say, for example, that it's the journey, not the destination. Even as a trained skeptic, hazed in newspaper newsrooms back when such things existed, I can only nod my head as I page through this issue of *Wildsam*. For story after story, we sent writers and photographers to specific places. And again and again, the process of getting there, the people encountered along the way, the random and unexpected finds—that's the real story.

We sent photographer Ethan Gulley and writer Russell Worth Parker on trips into the North Georgia outback (p. 52), and they returned with tales of roadside wisdom and pictures of highland wildflowers and enviable pie. David Coggins, one of the great fly-fishing writers around these days, takes us to the Catskills and its rivers of note (p. 42), but his story ducks in and out of many small-town shops and restaurants, which prove to be the real catch. Writer Tom Wilmes and photographer Maddie Hordinski lingered at a treasured horse track in Kentucky (p. 36), and the yarn-spinning of buglers, jockeys and race-callers brings the place to life.

This principle shines especially bright in our story about singular food stops along the American highway, edited by our own Jennifer Justus (p. 74). Interstate driving is, of course, the epitome of Point A-to-Point B travel, but as we discover, even the most generic-looking offramp might hide a one-of-one discovery. The stories gathered in that piece traverse the country, fuelled by nanner-nanner pudding and Navajo tacos. It feels like the right way to do it.

On the subject of road food, there's a restaurant in my state of Oregon, 18 miles off the coast, imaginatively called Camp 18. A restaurant styled like a huge old-time logging camp, it is a festival of Northwest cliché: old woodsmans' tools, antler chandeliers, portions big enough for a 19th-century work crew. Chainsaw sculpture. This love song to the region's past didn't open until 1986. And yet it may as well have been there forever. It's one of those places where you can pull off the road and find something real. And that's all we're after, right?

▲ A sneaky favorite of mine in this issue: Jenna Nienhuis's visit to a dreamy-sounding California beach where lovers of one throwback RV brand gather (p. 34).

▲ We profiled David a few issues back and immediately set about recruiting him to write something for us. Cross-reference both stories on *wildsam.com*.

▲ After breakfast, head west on Highway 26. When you hit 101, a left takes you to cute Manzanita; a right, towards burly Astoria. You can't go wrong.

We are a community of travelers at Wildsam. And we love a good story from the road. Email yours to letters@wildsam.com.

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ROAD

Cruiser RV strikes a chord with its versatile and fun floor plans

ILLUSTRATION BY DEE DUNCAN

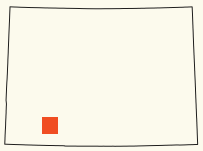
Colorado aspens' color shift, triggered by fall conditions, typically kicks in by the middle of September and lasts into October.

Scenic Drive

FOREST FEELS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
BEN WARD

Catch the Colorado glow on this mountain drive.



PEAK OUTING
Tucked among the folds of the San Juan Mountains and just about 35 miles from the New Mexico line, the town of Pagosa Springs (elevation 7,126 feet) provides a lively launch point for exploring mountain vistas, dramatic falls and serene soaks.

THE DRIVE
Wolf Creek Pass crosses the top of Continental Divide, while the more rustic Mill Creek Nipple Mountain Road rambles among golden aspens. Breathe in views at Lobo Overlook and Blanco Basin. Listen to truck-driving singer C.W. McCall's "Wolf Creek Pass."

DIP IN
The steam grotto and healing mineral waters of 52 soaking pools (and cool plunges) await at The Springs Resort & Spa.

RIVER RETREAT
Wooded camp spots (RV, tent and a few cabins) can be found along the San Juan River, along with trout fishing.

The Ride

JUST TOYING AROUND

BY KRAIG BECKER
ILLUSTRATION BY DEE DUNCAN

Cruiser's under-the-radar gem for active travelers.

WHILE NOT AS WELL-KNOWN as some of the more prominent brands in the RV space, Cruiser RV has been around for nearly four decades. Over that time, the company has earned a reputation for build quality, craftsmanship and innovative design. No where is this more evident than with the Stryker toy hauler, a towable that defies industry conventions to chart its own course.

Unlike most toy haulers, the Stryker is a travel trailer rather than a fifth-wheel. That alone makes it more accessible to a wider audience. And with a weight of just 7,334 pounds and a 29' 4" length, the entry-level ST2314 floor plan further reinforces the rig's accessibility. But don't think you're sacrificing anything with this model. It still comes with a 14' 2" garage and a rear ramp that converts into a patio.

"Our models are 'open concepts', which works very well for the western United States," Cruiser general manager Kyle Miller tells us. "This allows owners to bring their large toys without towing a 43-foot fifth-wheel, making them more agile in and out of the mountains."

Need something with more space? Cruiser has you covered. The Stryker is available in eight floor plans, each with its own distinct identity. One model comes with an 18' garage with added space for an ATV, motorcycles, ebikes, kayaks and more. Another features a side patio to complement the rear deck, while a third offers a living space separate from the garage and room to comfortably sleep nine.

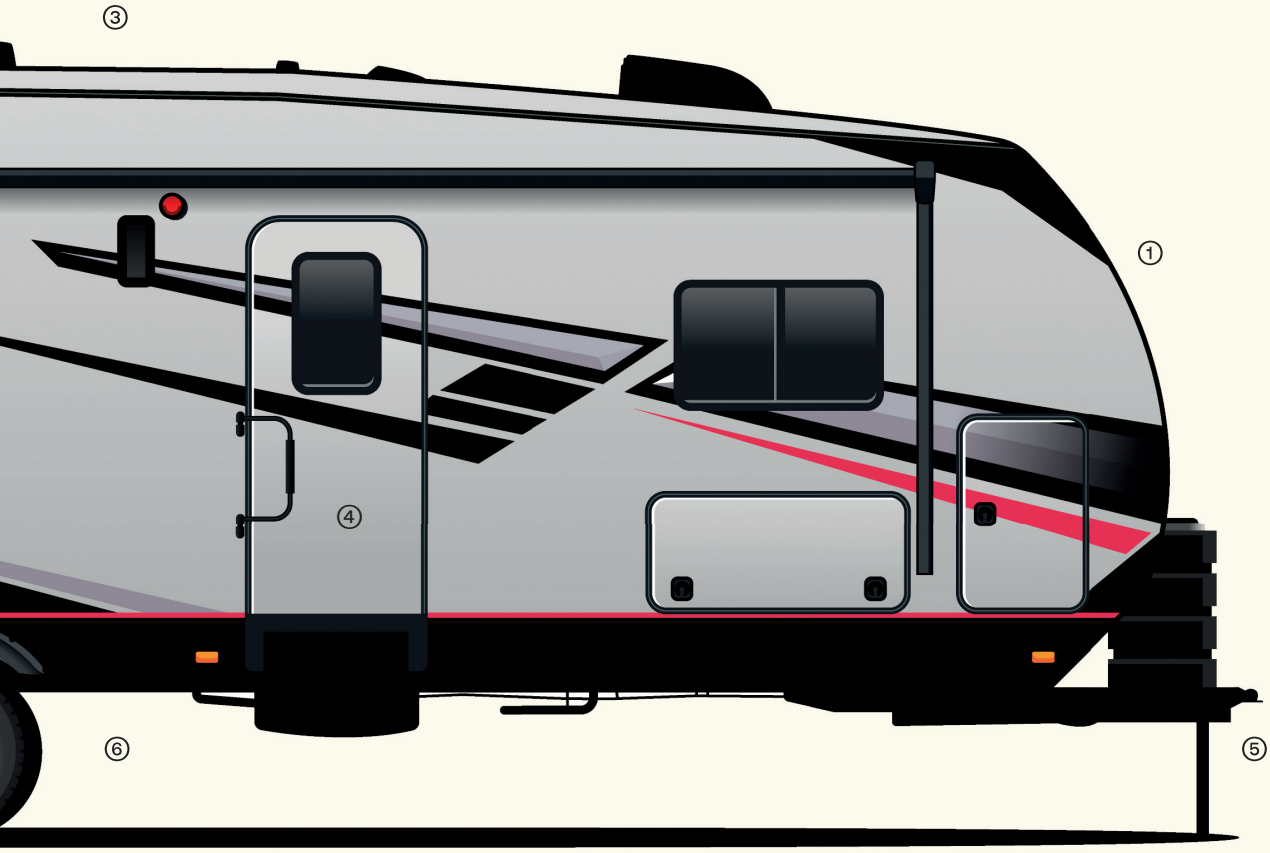
Floor-plan diversity is one of the Stryker's greatest strengths. While other manufacturers are content to make minor interior changes to their rigs, Cruiser gives each model its own personality. So much so, that RVers may have a hard time deciding which option to go with, balancing the size of the toy garage against living space and other distinctions.

No matter which floor plan you choose, all models include a king-size bed, residential-style appliances, and 190 watts of solar. The trailers offer generator prep with a 30-gallon fuel tank and a built-in pump for gassing up motorized toys. An E-Z Flex rubberized suspension and 16" wheels provide a smoother and quieter ride, while a 15K BTU ducted air conditioner and on-demand hot water heater keep you comfortable at the campsite.

Moving beyond its list of specs and collection of features, the Stryker cuts—well, a striking profile. The trailer is sleek and modern looking, with an aerodynamic fiberglass front cap and laminated sidewalls. An understated exterior graphics package adds flair without getting overly flashy. Deploying the rear deck only enhances its campsite appeal.

"Our taller ceilings make the living space feel so much bigger, even in our smaller models," Miller say. "We also trim out the Styker with solid surface countertops and larger microwaves, giving it a more residential feel."

Conventional RV wisdom says toy haulers aren't for everyone. But the Stryker may be an exception. Its blend of utility, versatility, and use of space gives it a broader appeal, even if you aren't bringing any toys along on your camping adventures. And with a starting price of $55,407, it delivers a lot of bang for your buck, too. That's something everyone can appreciate.



1. Painted and molded aerodynamic fiberglass front cap.

2. Heavy-duty suspension for a smoother ride.

3. 190W solar panels installed on roof.

4. Broad 30'' main entry door with telescoping handrail.

5. Power tongue for easy hitching and unhitching.

6. Reinforced axles with self-adjusting brakes.

7. Large tinted windows help maintain interior temperatures.

8. Rear cargo ramp converts to patio.

DIMENSIONS

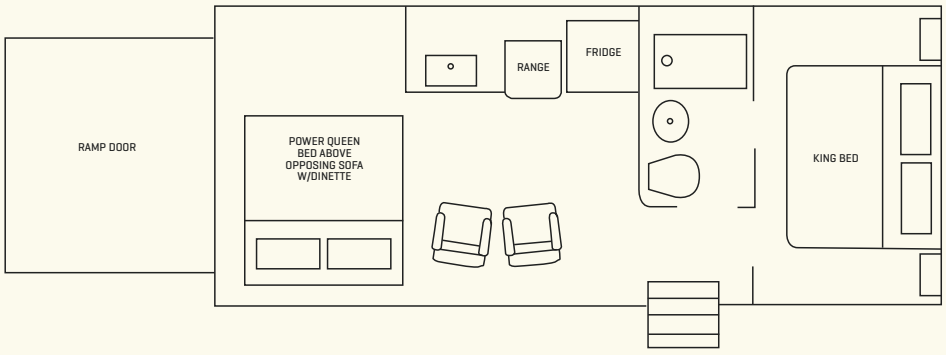
GVWR
Starts at
11,334 lbs.

OVERALL LENGTH
Starts at 29' 4''

EXTERIOR HEIGHT
12' 9''

HITCH WEIGHT
Starts at 943 lbs.

FLOOR PLAN



HEAD TO RV.COM/ MOTORHOMES
to read more reviews of new motorhomes of every class, size and trim level.

HARVEST SEASON HAULS

Hit the road for tale-telling, trail riding, shiny apples and briny brilliance.

HAPPENINGS

Chart a course from red desert dirt to a Texas gridiron.

OCT 1-5

AIRSTREAM CLUB NATIONAL STORYTELLING RALLY

GRAY, TN

Two great things unite. The National Storytelling Festival draws more than 10,000 yarn-spinners and listeners to celebrate the well-told tale. The East Tennessee branch of Airstream Club International rallies right alongside.

OCT 3-5

OVERLAND EXPO EAST

ARRINGTON, VA

The series dedicated to offroading and exploration in many forms holds its easternmost gathering. Brands, cool vehicles, lots of gear.

OCT 3-5

OUTERBIKE MOAB

MOAB, UT

The red-rock desert becomes a mountain-bike paradise as the temps cool. This event brings together riders and top gear makers.

OCT 10-12

DUNGENESS CRAB FESTIVAL

PORT ANGELES, WA

This ruggedly beautiful base camp town for Olympic National Park also sits near the famed Dungeness Spit, namesake of the Pacific's coveted crustacean delicacy.

OCT 10-12

CHARLEVOIX APPLE FESTIVAL

CHARLEVOIX, MI

This celebration of Northern Michigan's seasonal bounty takes place right between two watery beauties: the vast big lake, and smaller but beautiful Lake Charlevoix.

OCT 15-19

WOODSTOCK FILM FESTIVAL

WOODSTOCK, NY

An idyllic stretch of days for cinema lovers focuses on grassroots and independent creativity, usually with a dose of starpower on hand.

OCT 19

ROSENDALE INTERNATIONAL PICKLE FESTIVAL

NEW PALTZ, NY

We're breaking strict chronological order here to highlight a unique travel possibility: Can you go straight from the Woodstock Film Festival directly to this showcase of the sharp, salty and sour? Yes, you can.

OCT 18-19

SOUTHERN FESTIVAL OF BOOKS

NASHVILLE, TN

One of the country's oldest literary festivals marks its 37th year with talks, performances, publishers and authors galore.

OCT 24

THE BUM PHILLIPS BOWL

NEDERLAND, TX

A.K.A. "Mid-County Madness," the clash between Port Neches-Groves and Nederland is one of Texas's most storied high-school gridiron rivalries. First contested 101 years ago, the matchup's unofficial name honors the coaching legend who put in stints at both schools.

ROAD INTEL

What's new and now for RV travelers.

EYES ON ...

WINNEBAGO IS THRIVING

Sleek and lightweight, the Winnebago Thrive is designed to raise the bar for laminated travel trailers. Introduced this past summer, the towable is available in three floor plans including a bunkhouse model that sleeps up to five people. Standard features include an Olympic queen-size bed, a surprisingly spacious bathroom, fiberglass countertops, and a massive tinted and frameless front window. Pricing starts at $46,760 for this impressively-equipped line of RVs.

LEAF PEEPS

"You need a 'Goldilocks zone' of rain. Too little rain and too much rain—bad for trees, bad for fall foliage colors."

—University of Richmond geography and environment professor Stephanie Spera, who studies climate's effect on fall foliage in New England, in the *Daily Yonder*.

SEE AMERICA

1.96B

The U.S. Travel Association's best guess at the number of domestic leisure trips American travelers will take by the time all is said and done this year.

(LEFT TO RIGHT) WINNEBAGO; POWER WATCHDOG; SIMON & SCHUSTER; HENRY HOLT & CO; KING RECORDS; ANTI-

THREE THINGS

ANIMAL INSTINCTS: THREE LIVESTOCK FAIRS OF SINGULAR STATURE

①

The Trailing of the Sheep

More than 1,500 sheep pack the streets of Ketchum, ID, in the signature moment of Sun Valley's annual salute to the Gem State's herding heritage. But beyond the *baaah*, this is a full-spectrum revel in culture, from Basque and Peruvian music and dancing to high-minded conversation about Western conservation issues and literature. *Oct 8-12*

②

Cochins International Western National Meet

The Minnesota State Poultry Association plays host in Hutchinson, as advocates of the large and downright showy chicken breed gather. With extravagant plumage and varied colors, these big birds helped establish poultry breeding as a pursuit. Recognize! *Oct 25-26*

③

2025 World Clydesdale Show

This is not an annual affair. No, like the Olympics or World Cup, the World Clydesdale Show comes along only once every few years, making this major moment for enthusiasts of the brawny breed. Springfield, IL does the honors this time, with a dizzying slate of events and classes. *Oct 1-5*

NEW GEAR WATCH

THE POWER WATCHDOG POWER CENTER

Power Watchdog has a new product that takes the stress out of plugging into that sketchy campsite power pole. The Watchdog Power Center comes with surge protection and voltage boosting that ensures only clean, reliable energy flows into your rig. This helps protect your RV appliances and personal gadgets, while preventing electrical spikes. The device comes in 30A and 50A versions and includes onboard Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connectivity. *powerwatchdog.com*

AUDIOPHILE

What we're listening to on the road.

PODCASTS

***SOUNDS SOUTHERN* [ONGOING]**

Trust: It's incredible. Alice Pierotti expresses Mississippi roots through extended recordings of natural soundscapes. "Katydid Chorus Under the Full Buck Moon" made us believers.

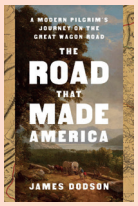
***THE WILD SEASON SIX* / 2025**

Way up on the other end of the country, this solidly crafted show from Seattle's KUOW features host Chris Morgan's chipper British accent and immersive reporting on natural issues in the West.

***PURDY PICKERS* EPISODE 2: HAZEL DICKENS**

Carol Rebell and Kikki Géron banter and charm as each episode explores the career of one notable woman in bluegrass, folk and Americana.

AUDIOBOOKS



↑

THE ROAD THAT MADE AMERICA

By James Dodson

Before Route 66, before the Erie Canal, the Great Wagon Road linked Pennsylvania and Georgia and helped shape the nation. Explore it.

↑

ONE OF US

By Dan Chaon

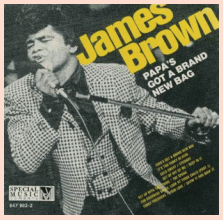
It's a good month for some American Gothic, provided here by a creepy tale of carnival life back in 1915.

THE DEVIL IS A SOUTHPAW

By Brandon Hobson

Hobson, a Cherokee Nation citizen and Pushcart-winning author, tells entwined tales of loyalty and art. Actor/musician Stephen Ghostkeeper reads.

ARCHIVAL GEM



PAPA'S GOT A BRAND NEW BAG

By James Brown

Not many supplied more inspiration for the next adventure than The Godfather. This classic turns 60.

NEW ALBUM

NEON GREY MIDNIGHT GREEN

NEKO CASE

The brilliant folk/country songwriter explores orchestral vibes, perfect for zen autumn drive-time.

PLAYLIST

Come with us on a trip through Alabama with this playlist created by **Blake Ells** for Wildsam's guidebook to the Yellowhammer State. The Nashville-based writer and proud alumnus of Auburn University grew up in Rogersville. He has written two books on the iconic music scene in the state, including its legendary Muscle Shoals studios. These picks from a longer list of 18 songs will keep the wheels turning.

① "I'LL TAKE YOU THERE," THE STAPLE SINGERS

"David Fricke of *Rolling Stone* called it the epitome of the Muscle Shoals Sound."

② "WHEN A MAN LOVES A WOMAN," PERCY SLEDGE

"Leighton-born hospital orderly finds stardom his first time in the studio."

③ "KAW-LIGA," HANK WILLIAMS

"Choosing one song from the son of Mount Olive who defined country music is ... difficult. This one, written with Fred Rose, is iconic."

④ "SPACE IS THE PLACE," SUN RA

"While space may have been the place for his story, his roots were the Magic City of Birmingham."

⑤ "TVA," DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS

"Jason Isbell penned this one. Lyrical storytelling about Northwest Alabama."

Shop Talk

COACH CRAFT

BY JOHN LOEPPKY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMBER BRACKEN

Pleasure-Way builds luxurious Class Bs, north of the border.

THERE MIGHT BE NO BETTER SLOGAN for outdoorsy types than Saskatchewan's provincial motto: "Land of living skies." It's on T-shirts, it's on license plates and it's tied to a place that seems to sprout just as many homegrown businesses as it does bushels of wheat. One of those businesses is Pleasure-Way Industries, a Saskatoon-based producer of premium class B motorhomes.

Now led by CEO Dean Rumpel, whose kids also work within the →

Cummins
The NEW Onan QG 7000i DF:
Legendary Power & Comfort
Scan the QR code to learn more about the newest Cummins RV generator in "Watts in the Woods: Bigfoot's Off-Grid Guide".
Onan
QG 7000i DF

business, the company was founded by his father, Merv, who still comes in a few times a week at the age of 92, mostly to drink coffee and talk business. The way Dean tells it, the company's origin story began with one of Merv's simple business decisions in 1986.

"During that time, he was selling trailers and other RVs," Dean Rumpel recounts. "Another manufacturer came by trying to establish a dealership to sell a product. And my dad thought, 'This was a good idea; sure, I'll sign up.' But they couldn't supply for six months. So at that point, my dad thought, 'Well, hey, I could probably build a van in six months.'"

Turns out, he could. In 1986, Merv built 10 Class B motorhomes. And close to 40 years—and more than 20,000 units later—Pleasure-Way has grown from an original team of 10 to one that now stands around 170.

The years have seen product and manufacturing changes, shifts in consumer dynamics and a growing dealer network that stretches across the U.S. and Canada. Still, when Dean Rumpel reflects, he feels that commitment to people and quality is the factor that has kept Pleasure-Way independent and thriving.

SHOP
PLEASURE-WAY

LOCATION
SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN, CANADA

FOUNDED
1986

SPECIALITY
CLASS B RVS

Pleasure-Way is a stronghold of RV building far from the industry's epicenter.

Q: What makes your product distinctive?
We are one of the oldest producers of camper vans, also known as Class B motorhomes, in North America. When you're working in such a small space, there's limited opportunity for new designs. But we have always transitioned, over the years, from different chassis to offering different floor plans. And our biggest thing that we are known for is the quality of what we build. We will build a unit from start to finish, and instead of it going down an assembly line, it's run in what we call a stall. So, one person will build all the cabinetry in that unit. And then, instead of it running down a line and people jumping in and doing separate things, everybody comes to the van.

Q: Can you talk about how customer sensibilities have changed over the years and how the company has adapted to the market?
One of the biggest changes in probably the last seven, eight years has been the introduction of lithium-based house batteries. When they first came out, some manufacturers were offering them as very expensive options, which they were. We were the first manufacturer to make lithium batteries standard, and that has evolved into more complex, sophisticated systems that are still user friendly. We are also one of the first manufacturers to adopt and make standard multiplex wiring, so that it eliminates all the types of switches and controls and puts them on two panels. So from two panels, you can control all your lights, your air conditioning, hot water, furnace, thermostats. Everything is done.

Q: Being based in Saskatchewan, what advantage and or disadvantage do you feel that gives you in the market?
We have an advantage because there is no other RV manufacturing competition here. So, we tend

to have staff who stay a little bit longer, for sure. The disadvantage is a lot of the components and everything we buy, we have to truck in from Elkhart, Indiana—where much of the RV industry is based—so that's an added expense.

Q: Every unit is trailered to the customer. Is that a unique selling point?
When you purchase it, you're breaking the motor in, you're breaking the coach in yourself. It's not being driven across the country and dropped off. That's the real basis of it, and it's just easier for us to ship a couple, two or three, units on a flat deck truck and aim them in a direction and drop them off and have that customer be the first person to drive the coach.

Q: As one of the older companies in the space, how do you think about legacy building as a company and as a family?
I hope it continues, for sure. The RV industry was originally built on family RV dealerships and family manufacturing. There's been a lot of consolidation over the years. There's only a handful of us left. So, I hope to continue, this goes on into the next generation. I think we have a solid reputation and a niche in the market for what we do, and I think we can hold our own with the big, big players.

PICK YOUR CHASSIS
Pleasure Way offers 10 models across three different chassis: the Mercedes Sprinter, the Ford Transit, and the Ram ProMaster. The Plateau XLTS, built atop the Sprinter, offers a roomy interior with a full-size shower, 500 watts of solar power and a flexible living space for $237,672.

THE PROCESS
The construction of Pleasure-Way Class B is a 13-step process that begins with welding and metal fabrication, literally forming the structure of the walls, floors, and ceiling. From there, technicians move onto painting, fiberglass, electrical, and more.

BORDER CROSSINGS
Prospective buyers should note that due to policies in Canada and the United States, you must purchase a new Pleasure-Way from a dealer in the country where you intend to register it. While there are plenty of dealers in both countries, cross-border sales are typically prohibited.

Road Icon

SURF & TURF

BY JENNA NIENHUIS

Set sail: A classic camper with nautical roots.

IN 1969, THE RENOWNED boat manufacturer Jensen Marine, of Costa Mesa, California, decided to get into the booming RV scene. Their designers imagined a rig tough enough for seafaring, but made for the road. The Balboa Motorhome debuted as the first B+ van of its kind, promising not to "squeak, leak, rattle, or rust." The manufacturer installed a solid piece of fiberglass, as on a sailboat, atop Chevy, Ford and Dodge chassis, creating a stylish family van that fit into a parking spot just like a station wagon.

The boxy open floor plan highlighted ample storage, a wet bath, a kitchenette, a classic rear entry and expansive windows that brought the outdoors inside. About 14 dealers—mainly on the West Coast—sold the Balboa. Though a relative success, the camper ultimately fell victim to the energy crisis of the early '70s. Only about 1,000 vans ever reached the market.

Nowadays, these rigs are uncommon in the wild. Unless you're in the tight-knit coastal town of Cardiff-by-the-Sea, California.

On any given beach day, several head-turning Balboas join the lineup of Sprinters, Westfalias and creeper-vans-turned-surf-mobiles at the intimate Cardiff State Beach lot. Back doors open to reveal a sea-green playground where long and short boarders wax poetic from sunrise to sunset. Salty kids draped in towels crunch on Doritos while seagulls lurk around the edges in envy.

The Balboa phenomenon here in Cardiff is powered by Paul Tralka, who started the one-man, backyard van restoration shop known as Freedom Vessel. Paul bought his first Balboa from a 90-year-old former pilot over a landline. "It worked all the time, had power, space, and big windows so I didn't feel trapped or guilty if I was inside of it while camping," says Tralka.

From there, curious, gull-like bystanders and friends inquired about where to get one, so he started restoring and selling Balboas one by one, saving these relics from junkyards and "Grandpa's backyard" around the country. The demand for Balboas runs year-round in this sweet spot home base, where the van complements the town's nostalgic hippie culture and amplifies the outdoor lifestyle.

Paul has since renovated over 40 Balboas, including the first one ever made, named the Surveyor after a lunar vehicle of that era. Each van has a story and distinct personality, costing a quarter of the price of a new van, but with a 50-year-old caveat: it may or may not make it to Alaska.

"Our Balboa's name is Loretta," says local owner Agatha Borrelli, "and she is absolutely a Loretta." More than a recreational vehicle, their van serves as a spotlight in brand photo shoots for Borrelli's production company and a post-surf therapy lounge for her husband's clients.

From the wisdom of the sea came a short-lived but longstanding van, a pioneer for others in its class. Now transforming a beach town, the Balboa community and Freedom Vessel are making good on Jensen Marine's original adage: Getting there is all the fun.

BALBOA MOTORHOME

Küat

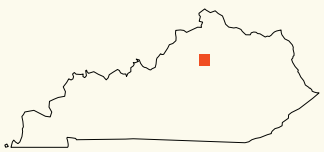
The new Piston™ ION is an extension of our award-winning Piston family. It's built to handle it all – from backcountry singletrack to weekend getaway cruises. Designed with features like a 100 lb per tray capacity, an included ramp, fender compatibility, and optional accessory light kits, the Piston ION puts user experience first. "With the explosive growth of e-bikes, we knew riders needed a rack that could handle heavy loads without sacrificing ease of use," says Luke Kuschmeader, Küat President. RV and off-road rated and tough enough for heavy e-bikes, it's the perfect rack for riders who go off the grid or around the block.

KUAT.COM

Pilgrimage

POLE POSITION

BY TOM WILMES
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MADELEINE HORDINSKI



Find the fast-beating heart of Kentucky horse culture.

OUTSIDE OF LEXINGTON, just six or so miles to the east of downtown on Versailles Road (a.k.a. Highway 60), urbanity gives way to rolling hills, white-painted fences and the red-trimmed barns of Calumet Farm, which has produced more Kentucky Derby-winning horses (10) than any other. Then, stone

Keenland's Sping and Fall Meets are fan favorites and highlight's of Kentucky's racing calendar.

columns mark the entrance to Keeneland. A tree-shaded drive leads to the nine-decade-old racetrack's limestone-clad grandstands. Travellers can visit year-round. But on race days—concentrated in "meets," in October in the fall and April in the spring, with about 15 race days across each of those months—this track becomes a pageant of muscular Thoroughbreds and splashes of color.

While many of America's prominent horse-racing venues (like Louisville's Churchill Downs, 70 miles westward) are redesigning facilities to attract new fans, Keeneland remains a place where progress is filtered through tradition. "Keeneland is a more intimate experience," says Steve Buttleman, official bugler at both Churchill Downs and Keeneland. "It's interwoven into the fabric of life in Lexington. A lot of people will say, 'It doesn't feel like spring or fall until I come to Keeneland.'"

With all due respect to the Kentucky Derby, this is the place for a true immersion into Kentucky's unparalleled racing culture. During this October's Fall Meet, the world's top Thoroughbreds will compete in a total of 22 stakes races—high-profile events with substantial purses—vying for a share of a record-setting $9.85 million in prize money. Winners of select races also earn points toward qualifying for the Derby.

Buttleman has been part of this spectacle for 13 years. Dressed in a trim red waistcoat, black hat and riding boots, he steps into the winner's circle before each race to play the iconic "Call to Post." Here, Buttleman brings his Harold trumpet, which produces a broader range of notes, instead of a traditional bugle, the better to match Keeneland's up-

ABOVE AND AT RIGHT: Keeneland is known for its combination of pageantry and accessibilty, an intimate atmosphere where race fans can interact with jockeys and see behind the scenes.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM WILDSAM'S GUIDE TO KENTUCKY

A trifecta of Lexington food & drink picks: Dudley's on Short, for a classic approach to locally sourced ingredients.

ONA, for cheeky, seasonally minded cocktails in an environment one local described as a "sexy terrarium."

Stealthy choice: the **Keeneland Track Kitchen's** buffet, beloved by jockeys.

Up the road from Keeneland in **Versailles**, the **Amsden Bourbon Bar** is a comfortable and historic place to deepen your cultural immersion.

Books for the travel satchel: John Jeremiah Sullivan's *Blood Horses: Notes of a Sportwriter's Son*, exploring the human-horse connection; and Crystal Wilkinson's *Perfect Black*, telling of the state poet laureate's life as a Black woman born of Appalachia.

Find the book at shop.wildsam.com.

WHAT TO KNOW AND WHERE TO GO

Information and reservations
The fall meet begins Oct. 3, running through Oct. 25, with no racing on Mondays or Tuesdays. Beyond the two seasonal meets, Keeneland is open year-round and offers a variety of guided tours. Visit keeneland.com for details and to book fall (and spring) racing-meet tickets. General admission tickets are typically available, especially on weekdays, with reserved grandstands and dining room options in high demand.

Rise and shine
Enjoy an early breakfast at the Trackside Kitchen, where you can watch horses during their morning workouts alongside owners, trainers, and jockeys.

How about more horses?
Explore local Thoroughbred farms with guided tours offered through horsecountry.com.

And the bourbon?
Nearby distilleries include Woodford Reserve, Castle & Key Distillery, James E. Pepper, Fresh Bourbon, and Bluegrass Distillers' Elkwood Farm.

WHERE TO CAMP

About 12 miles from Keeneland and adjacent to the Kentucky Horse Park, the Kentucky Horse Park Campground offers 260 shaded sites. Amenities include an Olympic-sized swimming pool, tennis courts, playgrounds, and direct bike and walking access to the Legacy Trail.

The highly regarded Elkhorn Creek RV Park is about a half-hour's drive from Keeneland, with full hook-up sites on a lush creekside spread, prices starting at $55 per night.

close-and-personal experience. “Often, when I'm walking through the tunnel, kids are on the hedge waiting for the horses and for me to come play for them,” he says. His repertoire includes Disney songs, showtunes and many renditions of “Happy Birthday.”

“It’s fun to show them what the trumpet can do,” he says. “Repeat visitors know that I keep little toy horses in my pocket, and they’ll ask for those.”

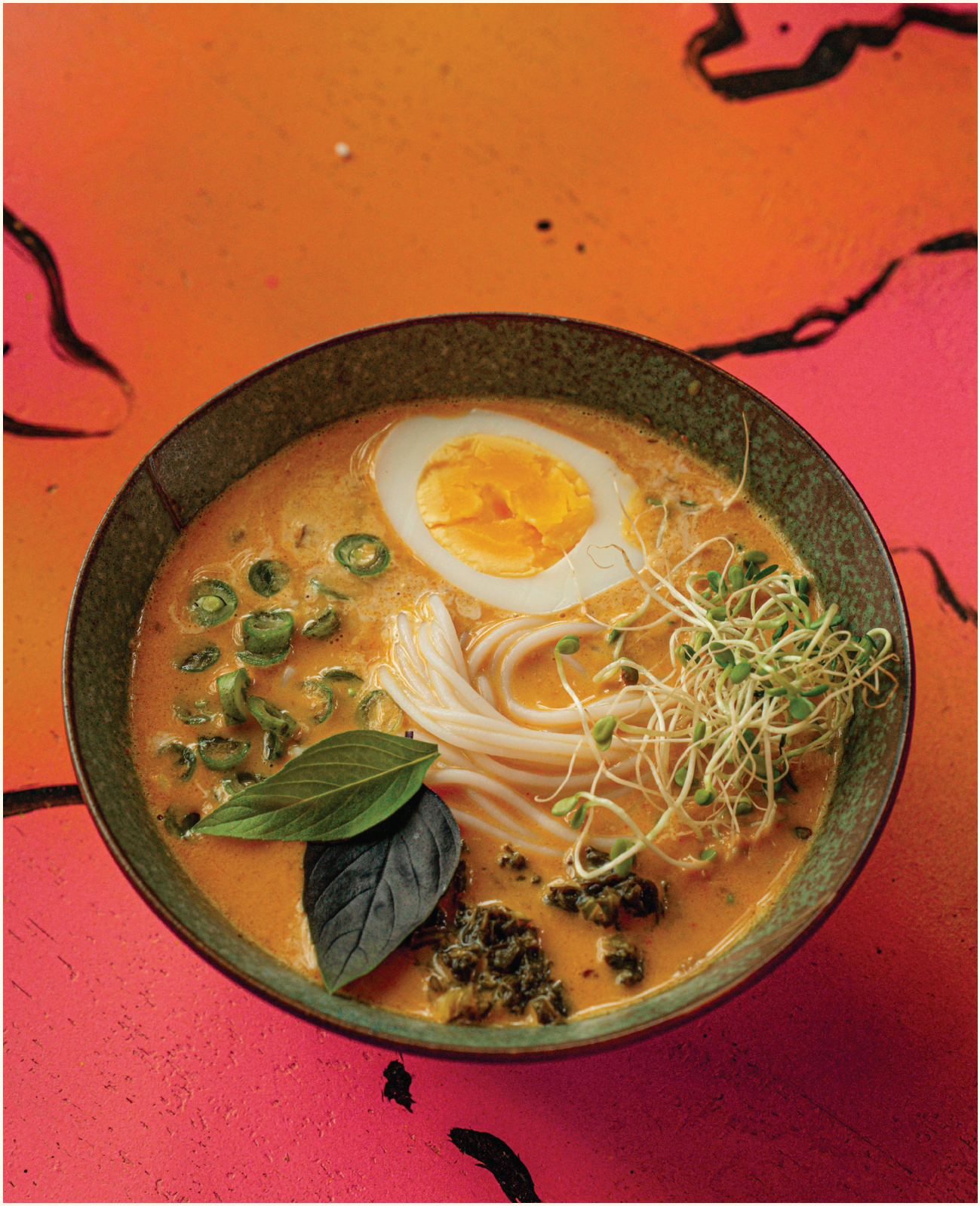
Announcer Kurt Becker, with his sonorous, even-toned voice, is another familiar presence. From his glass-enclosed perch above the grandstands—binoculars in hand—Becker has called races in real time for the past 29 years. He remains the only person ever to hold the job. “When the day comes to retire, I want to return to Keeneland purely as a fan,” he says. “I often hear people describe it, and I’d love to join them and just take it all in.”

From families with kids in tow to spirited college students, and from serious railbirds who study a racing program like it’s a map to buried treasure to newcomers who simply enjoy the scene, there’s no single “right” way to experience Keeneland. You can don your finest attire and reserve a table in one of the dining rooms, or keep it casual with general admission, staking out a spot by the rail or in the paddock.

In recent years, many racegoers choose to bypass the turnstiles entirely, opting instead for the Hill, a dedicated tailgating area with live music, food trucks, wagering windows and a jumbo screen broadcasting the races. Debuting during this fall’s meet (October 3–25), a new three-story Paddock Building will transform the central courtyard where horses are saddled. The handsome facility—trimmed in limestone, of course—includes several dining rooms, a speakeasy and a rooftop lounge with views of the paddock area and countryside.

Like most incremental changes that have shaped this shrine to the Sport of Kings, these developments seem likely to enhance, rather than transform, the Keeneland experience. Perhaps no one knows the mystique better than Hall-of-Fame jockey Pat Day, who notched more wins at Keeneland than anyone in his 32-year racing career.

“At a lot of racetracks, if you get beat on a favorite, there’ll be some cat calls coming from the grandstands. ‘You couldn't ride in a box car with the doors closed,’ and stuff like that,” he recalls. “But at Keeneland there was none of that. It’s a unique atmosphere, and the crowd is tremendous. It’s like Derby Day, every day.”



The Special

ELEVATED TASTES

BY JENNIFER KORNEGAY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAVANNAH BOCKUS

ABOVE: Dalaya uses local trout for its Khanom Jiin Naam Yaa Plaa.

A taste of the Thai highlands in the Smokies.

"IT'S LITTLE SPICE, NOT BIG SPICE," says a mom, encouraging her young son as he tastes jasmine rice and purple yams soaked in a cumin-, cinnamon- and turmeric-infused yellow curry. Eyes widen, and he grabs a forkful of his grandmother's rice noodles laced with pickled mustard greens before begging for more bites from his mom's bowl. He looks to fellow diners and announces, "We should all eat here every day!"

"Here" is Dalaya, the Thai restaurant that Kanlaya Supachana opened in Sylva, North Carolina, in 2019. As the server delivers dishes to other diners on the creekside patio, they follow the kid's lead, chatting up their neighbors. A young couple asks a work-weary construction crew, "What'd you get?" A group of golden girls chimes in: "Is it good?" They keep talking — "You from here?" "Where'd y'all hike today?" — the food making friends from strangers.

A packed house—the dining room is also full—keeps Supachana in the kitchen, but if she looked outside, she'd likely smile. Mirroring her native northern Thailand, Sylva's green peaks and greener valleys pulled her from a successful restaurant in Brooklyn. Dalaya is her homage to her roots in the Thai highlands, evident in a menu devoid of popular pad Thai and fried rice, instead packed with her parents' home cooking, like fish-sauce-marinated chicken wings slicked with a sweet-spicy sriracha glaze and silky egg noodles in a coconut curry with shallots, soy sauce and chili oil. "This food is me, my memories," Supachana says. She learned her favorite, Sai-Ua, a grilled pork sausage, at her father's side. "It always makes me think of him."

To feed more fans more often, she travels to nearby Waynesville for themed pop-ups. "I have many customers from Asheville, so it's a good halfway spot," she says. She's bottling her spicy wing sauce in response to regulars' requests. And she's still creating in the kitchen, turning out dishes that bring visitors from near and far. She can't make enough of her new mushroom salad: blue oyster, lion's mane and chestnut varieties pan-fried and tossed in a sweet-tart sauce of chili-flake, palm sugar, lime juice and fish sauce before being spooned over rice.

"Someone told me they drove two hours just to try it," she says. "No pressure, right?"

This past September, Dalaya celebrated six successful years, and Supachana continues to praise the residents of her adopted home. She remembers when others questioned her move to Sylva.

"People said, 'Why open in a small town? They won't appreciate your food. They only know fried rice,'" she says. "But I saw a rainbow trout leap in the Tuckasegee River and thought, my hometown also has trout. These people will like my food."

Outdoors

HOOK, LINE AND SPLENDID

BY DAVID COGGINS
ILLUSTRATIONS BY HATTIE CLARK

Fishing in the Catskills, on and off water.

WHEN YOU HEAD TO THE CATSKILLS to try to catch a trout, you've already made a good decision. This is the birthplace of American dry fly fishing, after all. The scenery is lovely, and there are more and more good bars and restaurants for when you're off the water. You'll find welcoming places to celebrate angling triumphs or nurse your wounds after the one that got away, which is a perfectly honorable part of the sport. Anglers come here for the great Delaware river (the East and West branches) flowing through the valley, and more intimate, beloved streams, like the Beaverkill and the Willowemoc.

The first thing everybody wants is a fly shop. Dette Flies is a legendary outpost owned by four generations of the Dette family, in business for nearly one hundred years. They're right on Main Street in the revitalized town of Livingston Manor and open early every day, like any proper fishing outfitter. All their flies are tied here in the Catskills—you can appreciate their artful minimalism. →

Visit Sun Valley

Escape to a mountain town that trades pretense for presence. In Sun Valley, fall is a well-kept secret—quiet trails, golden aspens, warm days, and cool nights. Without a freeway in sight, you'll find world-class recreation, art, and locally owned flavor tucked into a vibrant, laid-back community. Fewer crowds mean more room to roam, better dinner reservations, and deeper connections with locals. With nonstop flights from cities like L.A., San Francisco, and Denver, getting here is easy. Staying longer feels natural. Come for the adventure, stay for the soul. Sun Valley: an original mountain town that still flies under the radar.

VISITSUNVALLEY.COM/FALL

Travel Nevada

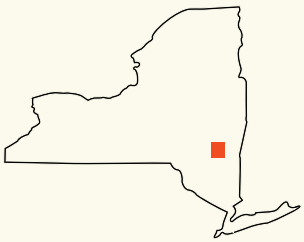
Looking for a trip that gets you a little out there? Come to Nevada for the ghost stories, stay for the goosebumps—and maybe even a pour with a poltergeist. Nevada's haunted history lives on among the headstones in the historic Gold-field Cemetery, Tonopah's creepy Clown Motel, and Zak Bagans' The Haunted Museum. Stay overnight in haunted hotels and remote motels (if you dare) and get a double dose of history and mystery. Here's the best way to hit the Silver State's most spirited spots and meet the colorful characters who lived (and died) there.

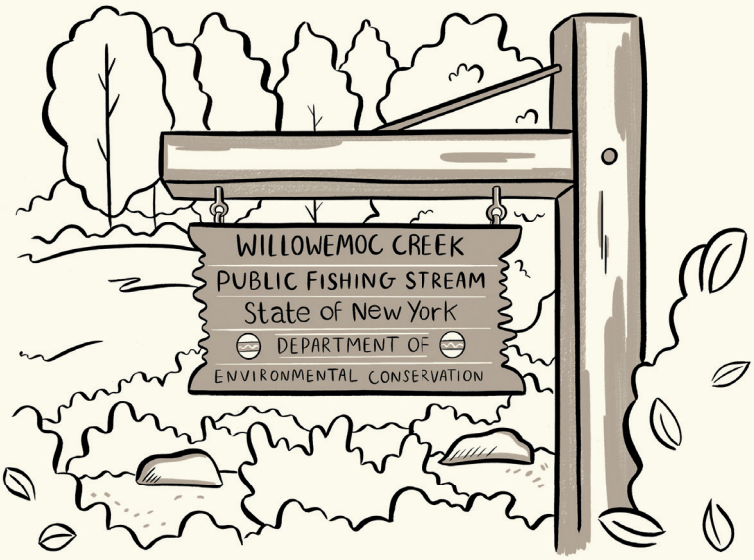
TRAVELNEVADA.COM

The Long Goodbye

The Long Goodbye, located on the emerging Manor Road corridor in East Austin, is home to a vintage-inspired lounge and patio bar serving proper cocktails in an approachable environment. The expansive beautifully landscaped grounds are home to food and coffee trailers, vintage markets, vinyl DJ's and unique events both large and small. The cozy interior space offers classic and signature cocktails, craft frozens, and a rotating selection of beer and wine alongside a classic bar snack menu and weekly features.

THELONGGOODBYEATX.COM



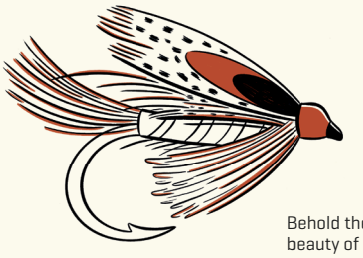


They're so handsome you might not even want to fish with them, and they make great gifts. The staff at Dette can point you in the right direction if you're fishing on your own, or connect you with a guide (if you give them some warning). You can also check their website for updates about local river conditions before you head up.

You can fish right on the Willowemoc, which runs through Livingston Manor. There are many signs for river access and easy places to park and wade. Or, float the Delaware, the majestic river that runs through the valley and defines the area. Fishing the Delaware means many hatches and rising, but very particular, fish. You'll need long, careful drifts and a lot of patience to catch your trout. Many anglers have been confounded by casting to rising trout who adamantly refuse to take their fly. If you come up short, don't be too hard on yourself. We've all been there before.

If you want to get a sense of the area's history—or just moral support from fellow anglers—then head up the road to the Catskill Fly Fishing Center & Museum in Beaverkill. Exhibitions and the hall of fame celebrate legendary local anglers like Lee Wulff and Art Lee. You'll see paintings, archival photographs, bamboo rods, ancient flies, all artfully presented. There's a store and if you're lucky, you can snag the pale blue trucker hat that Jimmy Carter famously wore when he fished here.

On the edge of Livingston Manor is Upward Brewery, serving German-style pretzels which pair well with the excellent



Behold the beauty of a fly. [This one for salmon not trout.]

pilsner. If you're more of a wine person, stop by the superb Upstream Wines, just around the corner. There's good brisket at Smoke House, overlooking over the Willowemoc. Around the corner, on Main Street, find Kaatskeller for pizza cooked over a wood fire.

The next town over, Roscoe, is known as Trout Town USA; you'll find plenty of fly shops and The Hound Books. The Junction attracts a crowd of locals and anglers alike to its warm confines and intimate front porch for smoked trout spread and cocktails. If you want to go farther afield, try the much-acclaimed Phoenicia Diner, which fills up early on weekends.

The DeBruce is an elaborate place to stay, with an ambitious restaurant. They have a small private stretch of the Willowemoc, which is a good place to wade and get into the sport. The Beaverkill Valley Inn is right on the famous Beaverkill River. It's close to the Wulff School of Fly Fishing, founded by Joan Wulff, queen of fly fishing, where you can learn the basics and get in the game.

FROM WILDSAM'S GUIDE TO HUDSON VALLEY & THE CATSKILLS

American fly fishing was born in the trout-filled creeks and rivers latticing the Catskill Mountain range. Below, three iconic flies from the region.

QUILL GORDON
Called "The Father of American Dry Fly Fishing," Theodore Gordon married his study of British techniques with his knowledge of insects in the Catskills to create flies that not only corresponded to the area's species, but also proved more buoyant and quicker in the water.

HENDRICKSON
Roy Steenrod Gordon's disciple and protégé, named this game-changing, evergreen fly after one of Gordon's best customers, Albert Everett Hendrickson.

DETTE FLIES
"The First Family of Catskill Fly Tying," Walter and Winifred Dette taught themselves to tie in the late '20s, before their daughter Mary, designer of the fly that bears the family name, joined them. Originally Winnie sold flies out of a cigar case at her parents' hotel. Today, Mary's son, Joe Fox, owns the family store in Livingston Manor.

STAY & CAMP

Cranberry Pond House, Livingston Manor
Painterly scenery. Peace rolling like a river. cranberry pondhouse.com

Little Pond Campground, Andes
Take in the mountain views along the ¾-mile hiking loop around the pond. Just minutes from renowned Beaverkill stream, with 67 tent and trailer sites as well as eight more remote tent sites. (845) 439-5480

Turtlebox

Turtlebox Audio is a Houston-based brand that specializes in crafting rugged, high-quality outdoor speakers. Designed to be the loudest, clearest, and most portable speakers on the market, Turtlebox delivers powerful sound that cuts through outdoor noise. All three Turtlebox speakers are built to withstand the elements with a waterproof, dustproof, and crushproof design. Whether you're packing light, boating on the open ocean, or powering the whole basecamp, there's a Turtlebox built for your pursuit. With the ability to sync unlimited speakers with party mode or pair two for true left/right stereo, Turtlebox ensures your adventures are always accompanied by premium audio.

TURTLEBOXAUDIO.COM

East Fork Pottery

From its factories in Asheville, North Carolina, East Fork crafts beautiful, durable pottery that brings people together around the table. What began in 2010 as a few potters firing a wood kiln on an old tobacco farm in the Blue Ridge Mountains has grown into a B Corp Certified company rooted in craft, community and care. Since 2017, East Fork has raised $1.7 million for local grassroots organizations while producing beloved mugs, bowls and plates in a grounded core palette and a rotating cast of seasonal colors that their devoted collectors—called potheads—chase with each new release. Their shelves also hold kitchen tools, tabletop goods and homewares made by friends and makers they admire.

EASTFORK.COM

Hailey Whitters saddles up at the Jones County Fair, Monticello, IA.

HARPER SMITH

On The Road

QUEEN OF THE ROAD

BY DYLAN TUPPER RUPERT

Country star Hailey Whitters takes in the territory.

AS THE UNOFFICIAL HONKY TONK poet laureate of the Midwest, Hailey Whitters honed her wit and wisdom in years on the road. Not only from miles touring as a singer-songwriter, but all the way back to childhood, her earliest sense memories forged across asphalt. "My dad worked in construction my whole life growing up," the Iowa native recalls. "Honestly, the smells of the road, like diesel and grease—those always remind me of riding in dad's truck."

Memories of her own road-hours have a slightly different flavor: the pink-soap scent of truck stop bathrooms, grease stains on late-night pizza boxes, Diet Mountain Dew fueling graveyard-shift drives from Des Moines to Nashville with her band in tow. "The road is like its own beast," Whitters says. "Essentially I'm traveling like a trucker is traveling. The truck stops start to feel like home after a while, and that scene starts to feel very normal and customary."

Whitters paid her dues in Nashville, penning hits for the likes of Little Big Town, Lori McKenna and Alan Jackson. But when she really broke through, it was on her own terms. She self-released her 2021 breakthrough album, *The Dream*, coming out the gate with well-crafted songs of dreams and disappointments, singing about being "12 years into a ten-year town" and hoping for luck to turn. Which it did, for Whitters, who soon toured with the likes of Luke Combs and John Pardi.

On her 2022 follow up, *Raised*, Whitters leaned into her Iowan roots, churning Midwestern motifs of red gingham, corncobs and Carhartt into delightful country-fair camp. (Check out her first platinum radio hit, the lime-in-your-Corona-refreshing "Everything She Ain't".) Now, on her latest album, *Corn Queen*, Whitters evokes the cookout, the tailgate, the summer night front porch after hours, cracked beers shared with the crickets and the stars.

With her signature winking wit and fierce advocacy of a nothin'-fancy good time, Whitters might be positioned just a bit off-center from most Top 40 country, but she shoots straight for the middle of the heartland. Discoveries from her travels infuse both her songwriting and how she and her crew roll on the road. At Char Bar, a storied dive in Columbus, Ohio, they found their own blue zone (blue curacao): "Nobody was on their phones," she says. "There were no TVs. The vibe was so great. We were like, 'what is going on?' And that's when we noticed everyone was all drinking these long-glass drinks. And then we learned it was a fish bowl."

Other highlights include: Boondocks, in Springfield, Illinois ("it's just a roadside honky tonk that was always really fun") and DanceMor Ballroom, in Whitters' hometown of Shueyville, Iowa. "There's only one bathroom in the entire place, and the first time we played there, we ran them out of beer and people started going across the street to another country bar and buying buckets of beer and coming back."

Suffice it to say that Whitters has been observing the country all her life from the road, from dad's work truck to her first solo van tours. These days, she's upgraded to a tour bus, but her outlook remains fixed on forging ahead. It's taken her years to break through to the heart of America, and now she has country music's ear with grit, charm and songwriting that brings out the best of the place.

"Seeing America from the windshield—you know, driving down the highway—it's all so different," she says. "But it's also so much the same in a lot of ways. You drive through places in California that can feel just as rural as Missouri. It is just really interesting the way that it all kind of works together. At this point, I've traveled to every state in the US. So in a way, just kind of being out there on those roads, it feels like home. I feel safe on it."

With Whitters at the wheel, or on the stereo, you might find yourself remembering how good it can feel to be at home, anywhere you go.

THE WILDSAM QUESTIONNAIRE

What's one place you've never been?
I've never been to Asia!

Mountain, desert or sea?
Sea.

Gas station snack of choice?
Diet Mountain Dew & Flamin' Hot Cheetos

"HONESTLY, THE SMELLS OF THE ROAD, LIKE DIESEL AND GREASE- THOSE ALWAYS REMIND ME OF RIDING IN DAD'S TRUCK."

The Goods

ROOTING FOR YOU

Foraging tools for the hunter-gatherer.

01. FUNGI FORAGERS GLOVES & SLEEVES
Tough leathered palms help with grip and dodging the prickly, thorny bits. Sleeves guard against the sun, too. $55.98
farmersdefense.com

02. THE NORTH FACE HORIZON BREEZE BRIMMER HAT
Sweat-wicking and serious sun protection with chin strap to keep it sturdy on your romp. $45
thenorthface.com

03. NO. 8 MUSHROOM KNIFE
This French-made curved blade and boar-bristle brush make a dream team in the forest. $34
opinel.com

04. DIAMONDBACK HD 8X42 BINOCULARS
Made for hunters but efficient for long-range identification of plant patches too—leaves, patterns, colors. $319
vortexoptics.com

05. BERRY & BIRD HORI HORI KNIFE
Japanese-style garden knife with millimeter and inch-size markings has both serrated and sharp blades for cutting through tough roots. $39.99
berryandbirdbrands.com

06. *THE FORAGER'S ALMANAC*
Author Danielle Gallacher brings us a newer offering for tuning into nature all year—forest to plate. $20.46
bookshop.org

07. GRANITE WARE WATERBATH CANNER
A deep stock pot and rack for sealable jars will have you putting up jams and soups in no time. $24.97 graniteware.com

08. HANDMADE CROSS-BODY WICKER BASKET
There's good reason for going old school: ventilation, careful carry of delicate treasures and natural distribution of mushroom spores. $85 modern-forager.com

09. BAREBONES HARVESTING & GATHERING BAG
Paraffin-waxed bag with detachable liner works for picnics, garden harvests and foraging—even when it's just to the farmers market. $79.99 barebonesliving.com

10. FIELD NOTES MEMO BOOK
Tough little notebook for all-weather sketches and notes. Dot-graph pages come on Yupo Synthetic paper, too—tearproof and waterproof. $14.95 for 3-pack fieldnotesbrand.com

11. BAUSCH & LOMB CODDINGTON POCKET MAGNIFIERS
Do you *need* a hand lens to forage? Not necessarily. But inspecting tiny plant details sure brings the joy and wonder of it into focus. $39.95
forestry-suppliers.com

12. COSORI PREMIUM MINI 5-TRAY FOOD DEHYDRATOR
What to do with a haul of harvested fruits or mushrooms? Make 'em shelf-stable. Compact design saves valuable counter space. $119.99 cosori.com

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(1-12) FARMERS DEFENSE; THE NORTH FACE; OPINEL; VORTEX OPTICS; BERRY AND BIRD; MOBIUS; GRANITEWARE; MODERN FORAGER; BARE BONES LIVING; FIELD NOTES; BAUSCH & LOMB; COSORI

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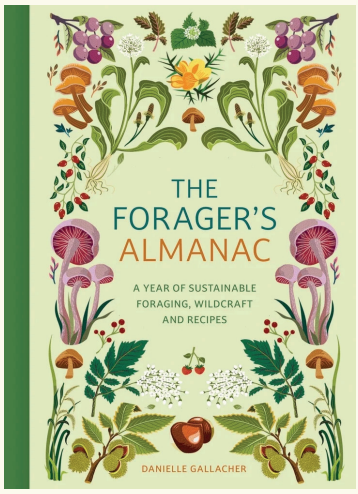

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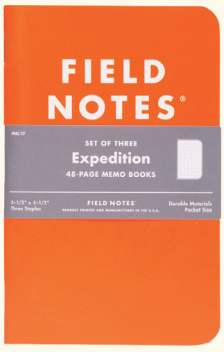

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The Gear

HAVING IT ALL

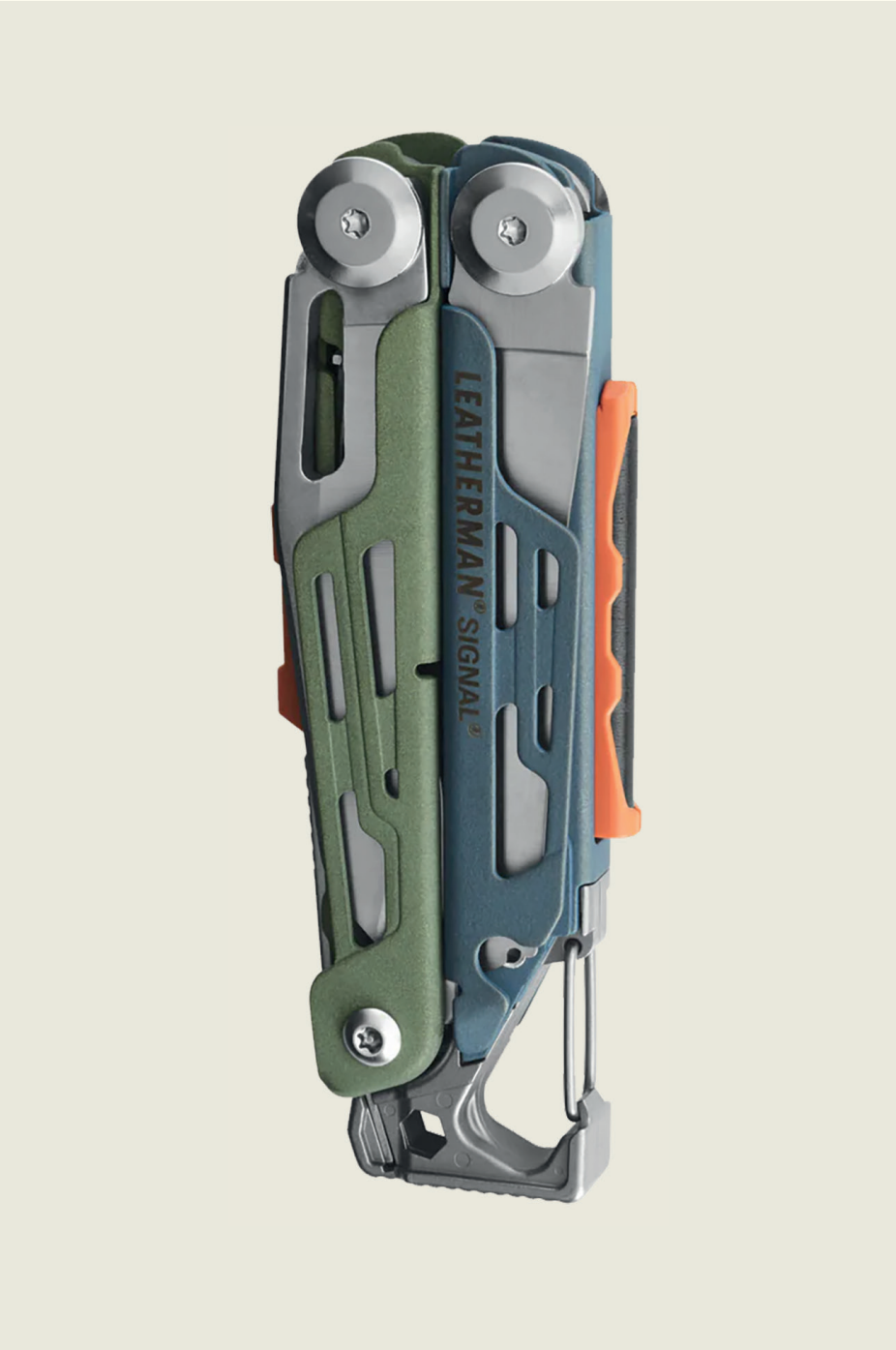
BY KRAIG BECKER

Modern multitools are rugged, sophisticated and oh-so useful.

DID YOU KNOW that the multitool dates back as far as 200 CE? Roman soldiers and pilgrims carried rudimentary versions that included a fork, knife and other utensils to eat while on the road. Even ancient travelers valued utility, convenience and a MacGyver-esque knack for getting things done.

Modern multitools are a wonder of design and engineering, often condensing an entire toolbox to fit in a pocket. They often pack in a dozen tools or more, including multiple knife blades, bottle and can openers, screwdrivers and pliers. And because they are usually made out of stainless steel, they manage to be very durable, without getting overly bulky or heavy.

Whether you're looking for a multitool for everyday carry or want one to keep around your house or in your RV, the options can be overwhelming. But the models listed below are some of the best currently available, delivering outstanding utility at affordable prices.



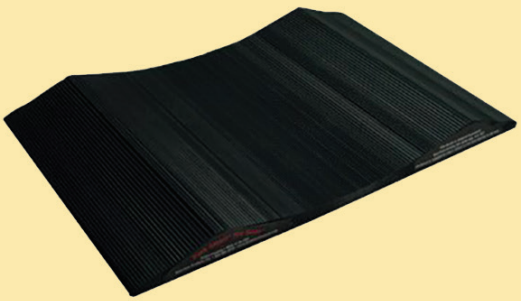
LEATHERMAN

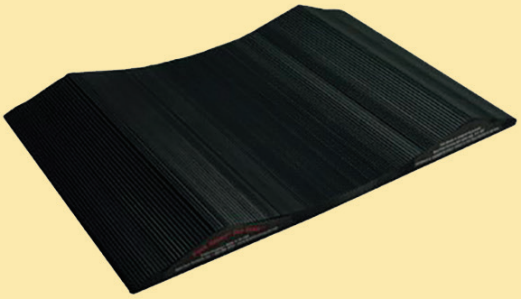
① Leatherman Signal
The Leatherman Signal is the perfect example of a modern multitool. At 4.5 inches in length and weighing just 7.5 ounces, it fits neatly in a pocket while providing plenty of functionality. The Signal comes with 19 tools, including a knife, a pliers, a wire cutter and both a can and bottle opener. Available in nine different colors, it ships with a nylon sheath, a safety whistle, a blade sharpener and a ferrite rod for starting a fire. $140 *leatherman.com*

② Gerber Center Drive
While the Gerber Center Drive features 14 individual tools—including pliers, multiple knife blades, and an awl—its primary purpose is to serve as a compact and versatile screwdriver. The multitool ships with a set of 12 interchangeable bits that, when locked into place, provide the grip, torque and rotation of a traditional screwdriver. For added convenience, the Center Drive opens with the flick of a thumb, allowing for one-handed use in tight quarters. $145 *gerbergear.com*

③ Victorinox Huntsman
Thanks to the famed Swiss Army Knife, Victorinox is practically synonymous with multitools. That legacy continues with the Huntsman, a modern version of the original model that started it all. Just 3.6 inches in length and weighing 3.4 ounces, this model offers 15 different functions, including two knife blades, two screwdrivers, a corkscrew, scissors, tweezers and a toothpick. Elegant and well crafted, the Huntsman looks and feels great, a testament to its years of refinement. $52 *victorinox.com*

④ Leatherman Wave+
A no-frills alternative to the Leatherman Signal, the Wave+ manages to pack a lot of functionality into an even smaller form factor. Available in matte black and stainless-steel variants, this 18-tool model includes three unique blades, a scissors, a diamond-coated file and not one but two pliers (traditional and needlenose). An excellent price makes this a very attractive option for those who place a high value on reliability and durability. $120 *leatherman.com*





Prevent Flat Spots

Preventing flat spots during RV storage doesn't have to be hard.

Long-term RV storage is part of the deal, which can result in flat spots on your tires when they sit on flat surfaces where the rubber meets the ground without moving. According to Edmunds, "...if conditions are right, a month of being stationary might be enough to cause problems."

Park Smart Tire Savers cradle your tires to help prevent flat spots during storage. Made of solid heavy-duty vinyl, these ramps won't crush, crack or slip, unlike those made of hollow plastic. These Tire Savers have no weight limit, come in multiple sizes and have a lifetime warranty. Uniquely designed with the driver in mind, you can drive up and over the ramps, which is particularly useful when driving off or onto the ramps. This is helpful when you have multiple axles.

Protect your investment and save 20% now with code Wild1025 at YourGaragePro.com. 800-992-2018

YOURGARAGEPRO.COM

TAKING THE

HIGH ROAD

BY RUSSELL WORTH PARKER / PHOTOGRAPHY BY ETHAN GULLEY

AN OVERLANDING EXPEDITION ON THE RUGGED GEORGIA TRAVERSE POINTS THE WAY TO NEW KINDS OF DISCOVERY—IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.

SEEKING LITTLE MORE THAN SOLITUDE

PREVIOUS SPREAD: Kings Creek Falls Trail, Long Creek, SC.
THIS SPREAD: Sheed's Creek Road, a short Traverse stretch that crosses into Tennessee.

Seeking little more than solitude and a place to sleep, my black Labrador Jed and I had rocked along a single-track vehicle trail for hours. We'd dallied along the way, stopping on a road barely clinging to the mountainside to let the beauty of North Georgia's Blue Ridge Mountains wash over us like the waves they resembled. Lines of summits faded from the stark verdancy of nearby tree-shrouded peaks to successively paler shades of blue on the horizon. Misty winds pushed by summer rainstorms wet our faces. Now, in a campsite featuring miles-long 270-degree views of the same terrain, I contemplated making camp hours earlier than I'd intended.

A friend always says, "Know when you've made it," and the notion of lying in my rooftop tent, contemplating the vista before me till the sun burned out, felt like an appropriate acknowledgment. But I'd come to the Georgia Traverse, a 390-mile overlanding route spanning North Georgia from South Carolina to Alabama, with excursions into North Carolina and Tennessee, for adventure. Plus, the thunder in the distance and the bear scat on the ground made me think camping at lower elevations might be the better idea.

Overlanding, a style of backcountry vehicle travel that is growing rapidly, offers enthusiasts the chance to explore remote places in rigs designed for self-reliance, self-sufficiency and living in the moment. Much of that adventure involves seeing what is around the next curve in the road. I've sought the same experience on foot for decades. In fact, unless you count living in a Humvee for months as a U.S. Marine, I've never been an overlander. But I also never knew that overlanding routes like The Georgia Traverse existed. And because I could not think of a more

CLOCKWISE: Glimpses of the Traverse's many personalities: mountain wildflowers; Hwy 60 pasture views; country culture at Fred's Famous Peanuts, near Helen, GA; rough seasonal conditions.

THE TRAVERSE IS PART OF A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT ACROSS THE NATION THAT'S CHARTING A NEW METHOD FOR EXPLORING RUGGED ROADS AND COUNTRY.

classic American adventure than pointing a vehicle west to see what happens or a better place to do it than the state in which I grew up, I called David Giguere.

Giguere is a mapping expert who helps plan and manage Atlanta's growth. He's also an experienced overlander with a passion for problem-solving. "In the nineties, I drove up to Alaska with a friend for a couple of months in a four-wheel drive with a slide-in camper," he says. "That was probably when I started to understand it was about trying to put yourself into an unfamiliar area, relying on your equipment and your ability." Giguere created the Georgia Traverse, a years-long labor of love born in 2010, when he decided "to see how many miles I could string together off pavement."

The project became an intricate route connecting public lands across Georgia's northern borderlands. And though the Traverse doesn't have the official status of the nation's great thru-hiking trails or scenic drives, it does have a following, expressed through YouTube videos and Reddit threads, among the enthusiasts who have embraced overlanding. In that, the Traverse is part of a grassroots movement across the nation: Routes like the Trans New Hampshire Expedition and the Trans-Wisconsin Adventure Trail have cropped up, charting a new method for exploring rugged roads and country.

According to the Specialty Equipment Market Association, overlanding has seen a double-digit growth in popularity since 2020. Troy Pittman, of Wilmington, North Carolina's Cape Fear Customs, a shop that retrofits Jeeps and trucks for rough travel, says overlanding, "[G]ives you that feeling that you're accomplishing something that most anybody else is never going to do, and you get to. You're a small percenter."

Twenty-four hours into the Georgia Traverse, I was beginning to understand.

Though it started in a serene pool at the base of King's Creek Falls, sunlight reaching through mountain laurel to make polychromatic the cool mist swirling around Jed and me, my first morning on the Georgia Traverse was anxiety-ridden. I'd accepted that half the adventure would come in discovering what I'd failed to consider. But I'd underestimated how much those things could matter, specifically the absence of cell coverage. As the icon representing my truck moved into successively blurring areas on my phone screen, I thought of an ancient mariner's chart, unknowns marked, "Here there be monsters."

The Georgia Traverse website lays out exactly how to download its 500 waypoints, something I am sure is simple for anyone who does not still have an AOL address. I do, however, and without a cell signal, I could not navigate the precise route. For much of my life, I've gone in whatever direction felt right, but that was not going to work for driving ever deeper into the mountains of Georgia's Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest.

I'd studied the first leg sufficiently to follow a road west through the same mountain valley I backpacked regularly as a teenager. But by the time I hit pavement in Dillard, Georgia, I wanted a paper map. After some unsuccessful attempts that underscored the relic status of both paper maps and myself, I finally secured one featuring North Georgia's trout streams at Dillard's hardware store. It featured no roads.

Heading eight miles south to Clayton, Georgia, I rued how much I felt like a starving pioneer watching a town grow larger on the western horizon as the signal strength on my phone moved from SOS mode to three bars. Driving beneath ridgelines where I'd spent childhood summers, the raw red earth of housing developments had rendered the soft curves of the Blue Ridge into something more akin to a fighter's mouth, all jagged and missing teeth. I longed for the solitude of my first few hours on the Georgia Traverse.

In a grocery store parking lot, I screenshotted the remainder of the Georgia Traverse and hastened to the next off-road section, where an eastern tiger swallowtail butterfly raced my truck down a straightaway. I slowed to let him win, cheering as he danced through the air, to disappear around a bend in the road, taking my elevated blood pressure with him.

AT LEFT: Cooling off at Helton Creek Falls in the Chattahoochee National Forest. ABOVE: Tubing the Chattahoochee.

I'D NEEDED AN ADVENTURE. NOW I WONDERED IF I HAD ENOUGH LIFE INSURANCE, PERHAPS A BACKHANDED CONFIRMATION THAT I WAS TRULY LIVING.

CLOCKWISE: Crossing the line; historic Skeenah Creek Mill; overlanders Eric and Kaley; cobbler in Dillard, GA.

As an outdoorsman, I am drawn to individual pursuits. I like to pit myself against myself, quietly. This usually means I avoid noise and exhaust. But with every westward mile of the Georgia Traverse, I felt my prejudices falling away. I was beginning to see that overlanding was just another way to engage with the world, specifically the great American outdoors. There are 640 million acres of public land, held in common trust for the nation's citizenry, all currently challenged by various political and economic forces. It's a time when people who treasure time outside need to find common ground.

As American public lands authority Hal Herring said to me, "You can't go around spitting on other people and telling them they ain't as cool as you because they like to do something else. When you're talking about the public lands, inclusion expands the collective effort to achieve an end that might be a more tepid version of what each one of us wants, but a fully expressed version of what all of us want."

On this trip, with no purpose beyond forward progress, I found quiet mental space to accommodate thoughts we don't get on a trip to a place rather than because of one. I was coming to understand that overlanding offers a new way to connect with the land I love. Trey Barnett, a Long Creek, South Carolina, coffee shop, pizza restaurant, and rafting company owner, offered: "If someone has a positive education and emotion around natural experiences, that tree is planted deeper in that person's heart."

Barnett's truth was born out as Jed and I dawdled on the Richard B. Russell Jr. Scenic Highway, enduring extended time on asphalt to see the views from a road named after a relative of mine. Though I'd become inured to solitude and missed the dirt stretches of the route, we stopped and talked to people traveling in RVs, on motorcycles and in overlanding trucks more fully realized than my own. At Brasstown Bald, we hiked to the highest point in Georgia. Sharing views of Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina, a man from Florida exclaimed, "The Georgia Traverse? Man, I want to do that!" when I mentioned I was driving across Georgia on dirt roads. He detailed his own planned adventure bike trip on an overland route from Florida. Perhaps someone can't envision themselves walking 30 miles to see a grand vista (as I prefer). But if driving their custom overland vehicle gets them there, and we both arrive at the same appreciation for the land, who am I to question the means?

There are moments when you realize you have mistaken enthusiasm for capability. Staring through my truck's windshield at little more than the hood and the blue sky beyond, I had reached one. Jed and I had been grinding our way up a knife-edge ridgeline for an hour, the insistent beeping signaling the lowest gear of four-wheel drive and creating an "incoming missile" vibe in the cab. Despite increased pressure on the gas pedal, my truck slid backwards, tires failing to find purchase on what felt like a 45-degree slope. Jed fought to stay upright as the back seat jerked and shifted like an amusement park ride. Looking left, I wondered if trees could arrest a truck tumbling ever faster down a mountainside. I had come for adventure.

James Elroy Flecker's poem *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*, particularly the line "We are the Pilgrims, master; we shall go Always a little further," has inspired me to many similar experiences. I've learned to take stock. Jed and I were hours out of cell coverage. No one knew where we were, beyond "the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest." I was well past the limits of my experience as an off-road driver. The only certainty was that backing down the mountain was going to be a tooth-sucking experience for a coastal dweller, even one with North Georgia roots and a decent ability to back up a boat trailer.

I remembered David Giguere saying, "You're thinking, 'When was the last time I had cell service? How far do I have to walk if I break down right now?'"

I'd needed an adventure. Now I wondered if I had enough life insurance, perhaps a backhanded confirmation that I was truly living. My midlife crisis aside, there was a problem to be solved, the essential attraction of overlanding. Jed

STATE LINE

MILL

STORYTELLER OVERLAND

Setting up camp at Ball Field Dispersed Camping Area, Chatsworth, GA.

and I needed to not be where we were. Only I could get us somewhere else. It was a situation in which I could find a rare singular focus, like a mantra focusing a monk's breath.

So, with Jed's head supportively resting on my left shoulder, I shifted into reverse, grabbed the bottom of the steering wheel, and, looking over my right shoulder like I was at a boat ramp, slipped my foot off the brake and let gravity have its way.

On our last morning, Jed and I awoke deep in a valley shaded by towering pine and oak, a cool breeze whispering as the sun tiptoed into the morning gloom, before slashing through the canopy to burn away the remnants of the night's welcome chill. Our lives offer so few moments without intrusions that I didn't want to break camp for the final time. I took my time with coffee and breakfast, moving slowly in storing my tent and packing for travel.

The creek beside which we'd slept offered a perfect place to throw black and white bumpers for Jed to retrieve, my calls and whistles the only noises breaking the silence we'd enjoyed since the night before. Still not ready to leave, I grabbed a trash bag and scoured the campsite for anything that wasn't there by design before simply admitting the truth to myself and sitting down on my cooler to watch the wind shake the canopy over us. Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath, thinking how much these wild spaces matter to all Americans, no matter how one accesses them or even if one never does. The notion that there are places where any American may avail themselves of writer Edward Abbey's "sweet and lucid air," to "sit quietly for a while and contemplate the precious stillness, the lovely, mysterious, and awesome space," is worth more than any dollar amount anyone might attach to these places.

The appeal of being one of Troy Pittman's "small percenters" was increasingly apparent with every mile I put between myself and a paved road. Of course, paved roads connect the Traverse's off-road portions, meaning every mile away from one is a mile towards another. It's just the reality of a country that's been fully explored in the geographic sense, where traveling a straight bearing will eventually bring you somewhere someone has already gone. Regardless, the moments in the going offered me time to think. Maybe the inner recesses of our mind are where we most need to explore.

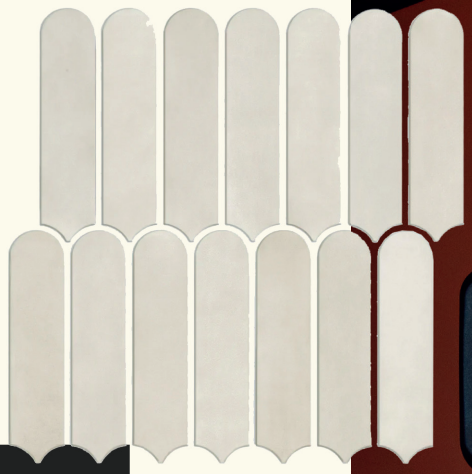
Departing our camp, I didn't bother checking the GPS I knew wasn't available. I knew which direction to go, that eventually I'd reach pavement, a little sadder for the transition. Confronted by the highway, I turned south and joined summer vacation traffic. I got honked at before realizing I was driving 45 miles an hour on the highway, a speed that felt outrageous after three days at five to nine miles per hour. Thinking back to the first day, the blurry areas of the map felt less like somewhere there might be monsters than somewhere to run away from them.

ABOUT OUR OVERLANDING RIG

For this story, our photographer, Ethan Gulley, traveled separately, exploring the Georgia Traverse in a Beast MODE XO kindly provided by Storyteller Overland. Built on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter (with a 144-inch wheelbase), this model exemplifies the Birmingham-based brand's commitment to the pursuit of overlanding. Among other features, it includes the Evictus Advanced Suspension System, designed for precision steering over rough terrain and in high winds, plus off-grid-ready solar and internet systems.

THE GREAT RV GLOW UP

EDITED BY JAY BOUCHARD

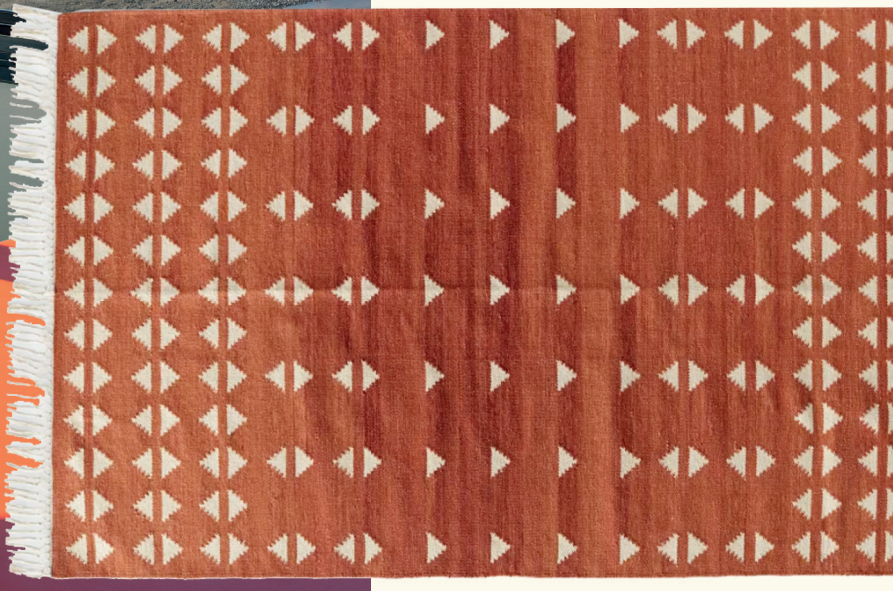


THINK BIG >>
The spaces of your RV can be rethought with ambition and gusto to create more comfortable, attractive environments.

(LEFT TO RIGHT) SHARK (FAN); COMMON AREA DECOR (TILE); RECPRO (LIGHT FIXTURE); KELE DOBRINSKI (@COLUSSUSMFG); LIPPERT (FAUCET); QUINCE (RUG)

<< THINK SMALL
Upgrades to seemingly minor details or everyday necessties can make a big difference.

WHEREVER YOU ROAM, THE LOOK AND FEEL OF YOUR RIG MATTERS. READ ON FOR TIPS AND TACTICS TO SPRUCE UP THE JOURNEY.



You love your RV. It serves you well. But as you travel around this great land, it's beginning to feel lived in, isn't it? Some interior spaces are a bit drab. A few others need a serious revamp. And you've always thought you could take your life on the road and make it, well, more livable. Here, we bring you 30 concepts (and a handful of products) that will help you do just that. The rest is up to you.

1.

4.

LEVEL ONE

THE EASY UP-GRADES

SAY YES TO RUGS >>
And a big "no" to nondescript floors. Area rugs and rugged outdoor ground covers make an easy addition of flair to any RV space.

SPREAD 2: (LEFT TO RIGHT) LIPPERT (CHAIR); FAUCET (VALTERRA); DLC DESIGN CO (@WHIMSICALWHEELS); SOLO STOVE (FIREPIT); WEST ELM (RUG); DOE (MSKT@COLUSDSMT)

6.

"The pop-up screen tent is the easiest upgrade I can recommend, especially in places where it's buggy. It gives you a whole exterior living space without doing anything to it. We have had three different octagon-shaped models. One person can pull it up in about 30 seconds. It doesn't take a ton of storage space, and we put a rug below it to make a clean floor space."
—Vanessa Russell, @theadventuredetour

8.

5.

<< STORIING'S NOT BORING
Seatback storage bags increase your overall cargo capacity almost effortlessly, keeping small essentials (beach read?) at hand.

1. Elevate your mattress and bedding (figuratively speaking). Stock RV mattresses are often made from low-density foam. If life on the move has you yearning for comfort, invest in a memory foam mattress from GhostBed or Brooklyn Bedding—and upgrade your linens while you're at it.

2. Bring a little shade to the mix. Sometimes you need to block out the light and add some privacy. With after-market shade screens from Magne Shade, you can customize screens for your entryway, windshield and any other window.

3. Create an entertainment center. We get it: The whole idea of camping is typically to get away from screens. But if you're out there for extended periods, an RV-specific television—one that can withstand the bumps and vibrations of the road (consider models from Jensen)—can transform downtime.

4. Add a little swivel. Since you're already swapping out the TV, why don't you upgrade your seating? Swivel recliners from Lippert are easy to install and can be color-matched to your interior.

5. Create more storage. You can tuck away the big stuff in under-storage bays, cabinets and other hidden compartments, but what do you do with all that small stuff? Seatback storage bags—options from Living In a Bubble are highly adaptable—make it easy to stay organized.

6. Throw down a rug (or two). It's a simple thing, but an area rug can take your otherwise dull flooring and inject a little spice. Even better? Reversible outdoor rugs, like those from Mountain Mat, can elevate your picnic areas.

7. Power the shower. A light trickle doesn't get the job done—especially after you've been in the woods or on the trail. For days when you really need water pressure, it's worth installing an aftermarket shower head. The Fury RV shower head from Oxygenics is a popular model.

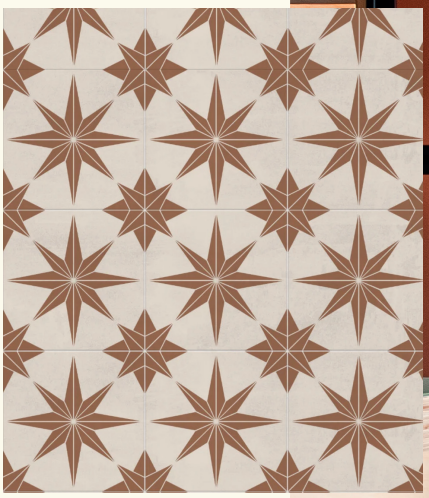
8. Go smokeless. There's a better way to have a campfire these days. Ditch the fire ring and the smoke, and instead opt for a smokeless fire pit. Solo Stove offers models that range in size and can be easily stowed away in an RV.

9. Cool things down (even outdoors). It's always handy to have a good fan onboard, and when the mercury climbs an all-in-one fan and mister can keep outdoor spaces livable. The FlexBreeze model from Shark can even run off its own battery, meaning you won't have to discharge house batteries to stay cool.

10. Install new faucets. A full remodel is a lot to ask. But you have to start somewhere, right? One of the easiest ways to refresh your kitchenette is to fancy up your faucet. Consider RV-specific products—Valterra has a wide selection—that can conserve more water and improve aesthetics.

DINE OF THE TIMES >>
A rework of the dinette space is one of the most dramatic gamechangers for an RV interior, both for style and utilty.

10.

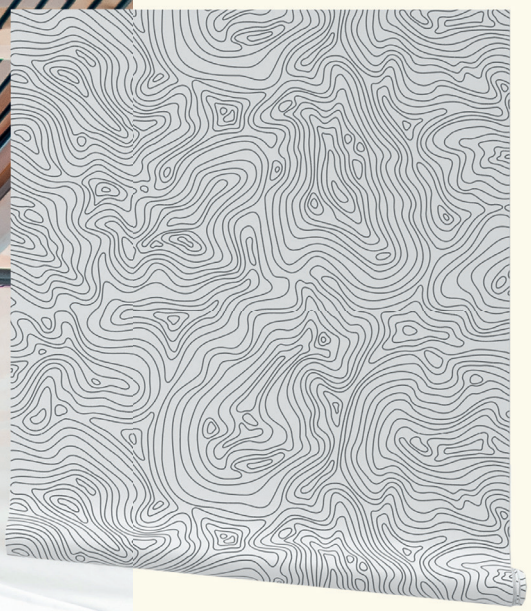


9.

LEVEL TWO

THE WEEK-END REMODS

1.



"Make sure any furniture you're bringing into your rig isn't too heavy. You want to make sure you don't impact the RV's performance by adding too much weight. Also, look for furniture that is multifunctional. Can a couch become a bed? Does the new furniture have storage compartments?"
—Sammy Seles, @bigheartstinyspaces

3.

ANIMAL INSTINCTS >>
If you're traveling with other species, consider their needs for space and privacy. Cats, in particular, will thank you (silently) for every nook and cranny.

7.

1. Install peel-and-stick wallpaper in your bedroom. Wallpapering is a test of patience, especially in an RV, where walls are small and corners are many. But you can make any living space brighter. Start with the bedroom, move on to the kitchen or bathroom.

2. Upgrade the awning. Most RVs come with awnings, and many of them—especially on older rigs—leave something to be desired. Solutions from Awnlux require some DIY know-how, but can be outfitted to almost any vehicle.

3. Add an aftermarket sofa. Depending on the age and condition of your rig, your furniture might look dated. Plus, the springs in that sofa might feel a little too springy these days. Plenty of brands offer upgrades, but be sure you order one with the right specs.

4. Install better steps in your entryway. If your fold-down steps have gone wobbly, replace them with sturdier, solid-contact models that reach the ground.

5. Increase your airflow. Most RV air-conditioning units aren't directly connected to your vents. Instead, air is pushed through an open area in the ceiling called the plenum. By installing a product like the AC/Connect by KoolRV, you can streamline the system and ensure cool reaches your living space.

6. Repaint the walls. Nothing will change the interior of your rig like a fresh coat. But it's not easy work. Your wall space might not be enormous, but prep is essential. Be sure to tape off all corners and cabinets, and clean and prime the surface before applying new paint.

7. Make space for your pets. Sometimes, your animals need alone time. Whether it's an easy-to-access panic room for when the thunder rolls in, a hidden bathroom litter box or an under-the-seat lounge area, there are plenty of ways to adapt your rig for your furry companions.

8. Go keyless: "If you can get rid of the keys, it's just really helpful. It's so easy to get locked out of your RV. 'Oh, Dad went to the bathroom—who has the key?' Replacing the locks with a keyless system isn't hard, and most brands have keypads as well as phone apps so you'll never be in a bind.." —Vanessa Russell

9. Replace your dinette. The dinette area is valuable real estate. But what if it was more than just a dinette? With a little ingenuity, you can retrofit the space to accommodate a breakfast bar, a high-top table, theater seating or a storage solution.

10. Zhuzh up the backsplash. If you're staring at a wood-paneling behind the sink every day, you might want to brighten things up. Peel-and-stick tile backsplashes come in a variety of styles, most of which can be installed in a matter of hours.

LEVEL THREE

THE EXTREME MAKE-OVER, RV EDITION

5.

7.

3.

LET ME COOK >>
A new stovetop, oven and other cooking tech (what did we do without air fryers?) can transform the RV culinary experience.

(LEFT TO RIGHT) FOTILE (DISHWASHER); CAMPING WORLD (FLOORING); DLC DESIGN CO (@WHIMSICALWHEELS); CAFE APPLIANCES (MICROWAVE); WEST ELM (SCONCE); WALMART (WICKER LIGHT)

LET THERE BE ... >>
Lighting upgrades are subtle but potentially major, giving life to once-drab and uninspiring spaces.

9.

"We live in our RV full-time and have three children. My husband is a crane operator. That's why we're on the road—we go wherever his work is. There's a lot of flexibility, so I wanted to create a space that feels as grounded as possible." —Sammy Seles

6.

1. Build a remote work station. Toy haulers are still worth it even if you don't have toys. The garage space in a fifth-wheel can be renovated into a proper home office: two monitors, retractable desk, lounge chairs, speakers and more.

2. Or make the garage a play space for the kids "We bought a toy hauler and converted the garage to a play space for the kids. It's an empty space with so much potential. The beds are on HappiJac lifts, so they can easily be out of the way. Once the kids wake up, we lift the beds out of the area and have full access to all this floor space. We added storage from Ikea and Target, and we have a folding play table that can be put away. We have a modular couch that can be two seats—or even a play fort. It could even be another bed. Everything we do has multiple purposes." —Sammy Seles

3. Install new floors. Flooring is serious work. But if you're willing to put in the time, few projects will so drastically transform the look of your living space. Choosing the right building material is half the task—hardwood, for instance, looks great but is heavy. From there, the job is about patience and precision.

4. Opt for solid-surface countertops. Ripping out old laminate surfaces and replacing them with something sturdier—and better looking—is a smart way to refresh the kitchen space. If marble isn't in the budget, consider a solid-surface material like polyester or acrylic resin, which mimics stone and lasts longer than many factory options.

5. Go custom with the cabinets. Carpentry done well takes time. But building cabinets specifically to meet your needs—and reimagining your storage solutions—can level up even the most basic interior spaces.

6. Reimagine your oven (and stove). You don't want life on the road to suppress your mastery in the kitchen. Consider a convection microwave—why not get one with an air-fryer?—or replace your entire stove with a drop-in gas-range oven. Stainless steel really ties the room together.

7. Replace your sink with a two-in-one dishwasher. Most RVs do not come with a dishwasher—and for good reason. They take up precious cabinet space, plus they're quite cumbersome. But that doesn't mean you can't have one. A two-in-one RV sink—consider a model from FOTILE—essentially splits a farmhouse basin in half, reserving one side for a sleek dishwasher.

8. Loft beds for more sleeping space. If you travel with a family or have frequent guests on board, creating sleeping space can pose a challenge. Not every couch should be a bed, after all. But by lofting beds, you can add sleeping space without taking away too much of your precious living area.

9. Replace your lighting fixtures and add a skylight. Any great room has great light. But not every RV was designed with illumination in mind. If you're tired of dark spaces and dull fixtures, there are a variety of ways to upgrade. The most ambitious? Cutting a hole in your roof for a skylight.

10. Install a stackable washer/dryer unit. Most RVs don't arrive with washer and dryer units on board, but many are outfitted with the necessary plumbing and electrical. So, if you're tired of relying on the local laundromats of America—and if you already have a compatible rig—consider investing in a stackable unit.

LEVEL FOUR

RIG REVIVAL

A professional RV renovator brings us inside the process.

Alice Zealy's RV journey started like many others: It was early 2020, she was going through a divorce. She owned a big urban house with a pool, but found herself unfulfilled, longing for something simpler. She'd owned a travel trailer in the past, but there was always an excuse not to use it. So, she removed a few excuses. She sold everything and started hunting for a used RV.

She eventually pulled the trigger on a 2003 Holiday Rambler Presidential. The 5th-wheel cost her $7,500, and while the previous owner had started to update the interior, it needed more love. Zealy, who has a background in interior design, began a renovation—one that would change her life. When she posted photos of her work to social media, people started asking her to renovate their campers. So she did. In March of 2021, she launched rain2shine ventures and began renovating RVs full-time.

Today, she's on her 17th renovation—a 2008 Keystone Montana—and has worked on everything from fifth-wheels to vans and Class C motorhomes. Businesses that restore decades-old Airstreams and Volkswagens are not hard to find, but it's rare to find someone like her who works on modern rigs.

"To this day, some people still don't know that this is an available service, which baffles me," Zealy says.

Given her design skills and her experience living full-time in her own fifth wheel, Zealy knows a thing or two about how to renovate a camper. Here, she discusses how the process works, and some tips if you're hoping to give your outdated rig a new lease on life.

CHOOSING THE RIG

Zealy doesn't discriminate between brands, but the key is, they should be in good shape to begin with. "We can do anything, but I try to be as transparent as I possibly can and say: 'Look, this might not be worth it. If you bring me a camper that is rotten from the inside out, I'm probably gonna call you and say: 'Are you sure about this?'"

She also recommends buying a used camper that's 2013 or older, for a couple of reasons. First, a renovation will make it look brand new, so it's not worth spending more money on something newer. Second, she finds those older models well-built and more amenable to renovation.

SETTING THE BUDGET

Zealy loves it when clients come in with realistic expectations regarding budget and already know that, for instance, materials alone can cost more than $10,000 for a full renovation. In general, partial renovations cost between $10,000 and $30,000, full renovations will be between $50,000 and $80,000 and a full-gut and rebuilds, as well as van conversions, will start at $85,000. Clients should also plan on a full renovation taking six months to a year to complete.

LEARNING THE PROCESS

An RV renovation begins with a phone call, followed by an in-person consultation. From there, she and the client talk details on their design goals and functional needs. Then the actual renovation begins with demolition and removing any unnecessary components—anything from furniture, to

SHARP DRESSER
Alice Zealy (below) and rain2shine ventures gave a 2006 KZ Durango fifth-wheel loving splashes of color and light, achieving a bright retro-modern look.

(LEFT TO RIGHT) RAIN2SHINE VENTURES (2)

cabinets, countertops, carpeting and more. In her latest project, for instance, the only items she removed in the kitchen were large, overhead cabinets that obscured sight lines.

Following demolition, repairs are completed, and then comes the hardest part of any project: painting. Prep involves removing all cabinets, sanding and cleaning, taping, priming and, finally, painting. RV walls and cabinets are particularly challenging because they typically have a vinyl wallpaper and pressboard cabinetry covered in laminate—all of which requires a tedious amount of sanding, plus special paint that will stick to those surfaces.

ACCOUNTING FOR THE ROAD

As Zealy rebuilds interior spaces, there are many RV-specific peculiarities she incorporates that home-remodeling experts might not account for. "You've got a small space and you have to make it multifunctional for different people," Zealy says. "Some people want to do yoga in their camper. Some people work remotely. Some people have lots of pets."

To make spaces more functional, Zealy builds a lot of pop up countertops, and incorporates shape shifting furniture that doubles as something else into her designs. Zealy also has to be cognizant of weight, since RVs are moving vehicles. While she typically removes more weight from RVs than she puts back in, she sticks with lightweight materials like Corian countertops, which mimics the look of marble or quartz but is half the weight, and makes sure the weight is distributed evenly. *–Written by Bryan Rogala*

INTER
STATE
LOVE
SONG

ALL ALONG THE "BIG SLAB" OF THE AMERICAN HIGH-WAY, MOM-AND-POP DINING ESTABLISHIMENTS SERVE MOMENTS OF CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND CULINARY BRILLIANCE. RIDE ALONG TO DISCOVER SOME OF THE BEST FOOD STOPS OFF THE EXIT.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY WHITTEN SABBATINI, CASSIDY ARAIZA & ALLIE LEEPSON AND JESSE MCCLARY

In early 2020, a trucker and folk musician named Paul Marhoefer—also called "Long Haul Paul"—went on a quest for "nanner nanner pudding." This was the siren song of truck stop waitresses across the South announcing their restaurants' banana pudding along with other daily specials over CB radio. Paul wondered: Where did the slogan, shouted out by so many through radio static, originate?

To find the answer, he takes listeners to three of his favorite Kentucky truck stop restaurants along I-75 as part of his *Over the Road* podcast. He tells the story of the pudding while steaks sizzle, destined to accompany bowls of pinto beans and collard greens. We learn about the evolution of mom-and-pop truck stop restaurants, about the resilience and heart of their workers, the importance of familiarity and a place to step outside the cab for a hot meal and a precious moment of a community.

"If you're halfway remembered," Paul told us, "that seems to make the food taste even better, as opposed to just being a stranger passing through."

This tale of regional pudding and universal need is one glimpse into an American institution: the roadside restaurant. You know the kind. Gas pumps out front; a grab-and-go store with beef jerky and chips, spinning hot dogs and mass-produced souvenirs. Often the menus of the attached restaurants are uninspiring. But every once in a while, something magical happens just off the exit. The dishes offer a taste of a place or its people, showing the diversity and creativity of this country. These restaurants help tell the story of the road, and of America and how we move around. They also manage to stay distinctive and stand the test of time even as corporate entities and fast-food chains encroach.

Whether it's spaces catering to the trucker pros or the regular gas stations for the four-wheeling kind, photojournalist Kate Medley has a theory about what makes the nation's roadside foodstops special. She's the author of a book of photographs from gas station restaurants collected over 10 years of her travels, *Thank You Please Come Again*.

"Regardless of how much money you make or where you worship or who you voted for, we cross paths in the gas station out of necessity," she told Francis Lam, host of public radio's *The Splendid Table*. "If we're lucky we find hot food and sit down at a table next to another person in our community, with whom we are literally rubbing elbows and passing the ketchup."

So to honor the mom-and-pops, we asked three writers in three parts of the country to tell us about a favorite place to exit for a hot meal. We visit an Indigenous-owned spot in Arizona for fry-bread tacos, a Northeastern diner for chowder and pie and a log cabin in Tennessee for home-cooked Indian dishes. Put on the blinker, tap the breaks. Lunch (and maybe banana pudding) awaits.

INTERSTATE 40 may not seem a likely spot for top-notch Indian cuisine, but the road holds many surprises.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: (LEFT) ALLIE LEEPSON AND JESSE MCCLARY; (RIGHT) WHITTEN SABBATINI; THIS SPREAD: WHITTEN SABBATINI

NAVAJO
FRYBREAD
OPEN

CHEE'S INDIAN STORE

I-40, ARIZONA
BY GUSTAVO ARELLANO

Wooden red-and-white signs advertise Chee's Indian Store. It's a small complex along Interstate 40 near the New Mexico-Arizona border, where the freeway cuts through the Navajo Nation. People who frequent that stretch can easily visualize its shaky font and its corny admonition to stop by and —yep— "Say…Chee's."

Chee's is one of multiple Native American trading posts along a stretch of Interstate 40 that roughly mirrors to the old Route 66. But Chee's can boast of one attraction few of its rivals carry, well worth a stop: Indian tacos.

The dish of ground meat, lettuce, onion and tomatoes and yellow cheese on frybread is a collision of cultures that always works. I usually eat them at powwows in Southern California, delighting in explaining to people how the Navajo nation made the best of what colonialism threw at them, such as government commodity white flour, with which they created bread and, then, tacos.

But an Indian taco is a commitment of time and stomach—and whenever I'd pass Chee's, I was often lacking in both. Food on Interstate 40, to me, always meant green chile in Albuquerque, steaks in Amarillo, burgers and pies in Oklahoma. I figured there was no reason to eat Indian tacos on the road since I could enjoy them somewhat regularly back home. But after speeding by Chee's for a good decade, I finally stopped by a few years ago.

The complex consists of three buildings: a small structure selling mineral rocks and petrified wood, a proper trading post with kachinas of the Pueblo people and souvenir T-shirts and a low-slung kitchen where they make the tacos. There's a bench for people who want to relax after ordering their meal from a takeout window. Above the awning is a sign that reads "Navajo Frybread," plain or with powdered sugar, a good call for dessert.

But frybread works best as an Indian taco, the sweetness and crunch of the bread adding a perfect contrast to the savoriness of its toppings. And the toppings at Chee's are as filling as they are simple. The snap of lettuce and onions, the sweetness of yellow cheese, the sumptuous medley of pinto beans and ground beef—this is comfort food, which is to say road food. You can try to fold an Indian taco, but I sliced my way through Chee's massive version. Chee's Indian taco isn't an everyday meal, but it should be an every time meal.

CHEE'S INDIAN STORE is a stronghold of the Navajo taco, made here by Shirley Ashley and served in all its glory.

CASSIDY ARAIZA (4)

DYSART'S

I-95, MAINE

BY KIRSTEN LIE-NIELSEN

Highway I-95 in Hermon, Maine, is a straight strip of pavement through acres upon acres of dense pine forests. The further you drive, the more the exits thin out. Small towns give way to long stretches of trees, where the smell of balsam drifts through open windows in summer and snow piles along the shoulders in winter. It's a part of Maine that feels remote, even when you're not far from Bangor. And then, just when you're wondering how long until the next sign of life, an oasis appears at Exit 180: Dysart's truck stop and restaurant.

The Hermon location of Dysart's is the original and the most iconic of a chain of "travel stops" sprinkled across the region. It's a landmark for Mainers, a tradition for travelers, and for anyone who's ever driven through this stretch of I-95, it's a beacon.

Pulling into the parking lot, you find yourself surrounded by idling big rigs, their drivers stretching their legs, alongside Subarus or trucks coated in a winter's worth of road salt. What you might have meant as a quick gas stop turns into something else entirely. The smell hits you first: a warm, homespun aroma of blueberry pancakes sizzling on the griddle, bacon crisping at the edges and coffee brewed strong enough to revive the most road-weary traveler.

Inside, the dining room is sprawling but somehow still feels homey, the kind of place where strangers nod a greeting as you pass their table. There's a pie case up front, glistening slices under the lights: lemon meringue, dense chocolate cream and, of course, blueberry pie. The walls are a collage of Americana, vintage snowmobiles inconceivably hanging on the ceiling, chrome truck grills gleaming like trophies along with black-and-white photos of Dysart's earliest days, when the truck stop opened in 1967 with just a handful of pumps and the idea that good food could make the road feel shorter.

The menu is a quilt of diner classics and Maine staples: stacks of pancakes, shortcake French toast, pot roast with gravy that tastes like Sunday suppers, biscuits swimming in sausage gravy, burgers with crisp fries, golden-fried haddock sandwiches, steak tips, pizzas, and even baskets of wings for late-night stops. You can order breakfast at dinner time, a midnight slice of pizza or a mid-morning steak-and-cheese.

"My favorite was always the Maine blueberry pancakes that hung over the edge of the plate," says Rache Herrick, a native of Mechanic Falls, who now operates Slow Farms in Cameron, North Carolina. "But as a homesick Mainer many years and miles away from Dysart's food, what makes me choke up with feels are the baked beans and haddock chowder. Nothing can summon me home like those."

The haddock chowder is a dish so iconic it might as well be on the welcome sign. Creamy without being heavy, the broth is brimming with tender flakes of fish, potatoes that melt in your mouth, and just enough seasoning to taste like the coast. And if you tell yourself you'll skip dessert, you'll probably be wrong. The waitresses are masters of the gentle nudge—and before long there's a wedge of pie on your table, blueberry more often than not. The crust is golden, the filling jewel-bright and just tart enough to balance the sweet.

Dysart's is the kind of place that makes you slow down, even if only for an hour, and taste where you are. Truckers and loggers sit shoulder to shoulder with vacationers on their way to Acadia National Park, forming a crossroads of Maine life. And when you get back on the highway, the smell of coffee clinging to your sweater, you'll know you've been somewhere that feeds more than hunger.

DYSART'S channels its rural Maine origins with signature blueberry pancakes and homey, low-key atmosphere.

ALLIE LEEPSON AND JESSE MCCLARY (4)

BUD LIGHT
Heineken
RESERVED

PUNJABI DHABA
INDIAN RESTAURANT

THE PUNJABI DHABA

I-40, TENNESSEE
BY TALLAHASSEE MAY

Just off of Interstate 40 in quiet Kingston Springs, the Punjabi Dhaba restaurant lives at the far edge of a large truck stop, in a shaggy log cabin more reminiscent of a Southern barbecue joint than an authentic Indian restaurant. The parking lot is an obstacle course of bumps and potholes, and the plain yellow-lettered sign is rarely lit. But inside, the mingled fragrance of spices and cooking ghee fills the air.

"Dhaba," in the Hindi language, means "roadside restaurant," usually implying local ownership and reasonably priced, homestyle food. Punjab is a state in Northwestern India, and dhabas run by Punjabi immigrants in this country scatter along interstates. If you drive I-40 through Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas, you might see the occasional faded billboard announcing a Punjabi Dhaba alongside other truck stop amenities, like a tire store or a wash and wax. They provide a service but also familiar comfort food to a growing number of Punjabi truckers.

My husband and I frequently visit the Kingston Springs Punjabi Dhaba—sometimes even twice a week. Although nearby Nashville has an amazing variety of immigrant-run restaurants, the Punjabi Dhaba gives us a quiet booth, and we can show up in all manner of casual dress. In the kitchen, cooks of all ages and genders tend to breads on the griddle, made to order and slathered with ghee and garlic before serving. Dals and stews bubble in large pots on the stove. The paneer pakoda and samosas come out shiny and crackling, fresh from the fryer, with a sweet tamarind dipping sauce. The korma is hearty and flavorful, sweet with carrots and cashews, and the mattar paneer shimmers with tomatoes and peas. Generous sides of rice, fragrant with cumin seeds, accompany everything. Because the cooks vary, the flavors have subtle shifts—a more toasty flavor one night, fresh tomatoes add a brighter tang the next.

A steady flow of truckers enter to claim their orders. As they wait, they might talk with family on the phone or watch the Bollywood videos that play on the TV above the door. And then they walk back to their trucks parked across the street, juggling plastic bags filled with to-go containers of curry, warm paranthas wrapped in slick paper and cups of hot chai or a mango lassi.

It is not long before we are full and ask for our own to-go containers for leftovers. The circular Bhangra rhythms of the Bollywood videos send us off into the night, and we already look forward to our return.

PUNJABI DHABA feeds truckers and other travelers with butter chicken and carefully chosen snacks.

(GUTTER) WHITTEN SABBATINI (4)

DYSART'S, like many roadside stops, serves all the conveniences of the road as a side-order.

"100-MILE COFFEE" AND MORE

These places pour a strong cup to keep you moving, or they're distinctive in other ways warranting a stop, whether it's hearty breakfast, fresh vegetables or a long history of good company. Many of the following have a trucker connection, meaning they either exist within a truck stop or sit adjacent to one.

FRED'S MARKET
PLANT CITY, FLORIDA
This restaurant, which began as a gas station and sits by a Florida farmers' market in a rich agricultural area of the state, means plenty of fresh vegetables on the buffet. Bonus: It has Long Haul Paul's strong stamp of approval. *fredsmarket.com*

THE TENNESSEAN
CORNERSVILLE, TENNESSEE
Established in 1974, it still pops up on trucker messaging boards for its barbecue and country cooking buffet of meatloaf, fried chicken and mashed potatoes. Open 24/7. *tennesseantravelstop.com*

FORKS MERCANTILE
LIVERMORE, COLORADO
Dates back to 1875. Gas station and convenience store on the bottom level, restaurant on the second floor. Serving smash burgers with local, grass-fed beef. *theforksmercantile.com*

JIMMIE'S TRUCK PLAZA AND RED ONION GRILL
LEE, FLORIDA
Known as the "comfort food zone of I-10" for the country breakfast, T-Bone steaks and 10-layer chocolate and red velvet cakes. Open 24/7. *facebook.com/jatpinc#*

DERBY CITY SOUTH TRUCK PLAZA
MOUNT VERNON, KENTUCKY
Paul Marhoefer, "Long Haul Paul," is a longtime regular and visits this spot on his podcast's "nanner" pudding quest. Also on the menu: chicken and dumplings, griddled corn cakes. Open 24/7. *(606) 256-3374*

BOISE STAGE STOP
BOISE, IDAHO
Biscuits and gravy to steaks and enchiladas. Its history dates back more than 100 years. *boisestagestop.org*

BLACK MESA TRAVEL CENTER
SAN FELIPE PUEBLO, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO
The diner offers New Mexican and Native American food—posole, green chile stew, Pueblo taco on fry bread with red or green chile. *blackmesa travelcenter.com*

GEE CEE'S TRUCK STOP
TOLEDO, WASHINGTON
Big steak dinners, kielbasa hash breakfast and homemade desserts such as carrot cake, cinnamon rolls and chocolate cream pie. Open 24/7. *geeceestruckstop.com*

CZECH STOP AND LITTLE CZECH BAKERY
WEST, TEXAS
The name gets dropped often when we ask about favorite gas station fare. Kolaches and klobasneks—fragrant fruit-filled and sausage-stuffed rolls—tell the story of Czech immigration to Texas. *czechstop.net*

IOWA 80 TRUCKSTOP
WALCOTT, IOWA
The world's largest truck stop. And sure, there's a Taco Bell (and a Wendy's, Blimpie, Dairy Queen/Orange Julius and Caribou Coffee with Einstein Bros. Bagels). But diner/cafe Iowa 80 Kitchen runs around the clock. *iowa80truckstop.com*

JOE'S KANSAS CITY
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI
Famous BBQ with roots in a competitive team called Slaughterhouse Five. Come through for a styrofoam clam shell of pulled pork and coleslaw. *joeskc.com*

BANH MI BOYS
METAIRIE, LOUISIANA
Peter Nguyen launched Banh Mi Boys from his parents' gas station, honoring Vietnamese heritage and the Louisiana food culture. *bmbsandwiches.com*

ALLIE LEEPSON AND JESSE MCCLARY

THE RALLY

Where travelers come together: voices, tips and insights from the road.

Tech advice written by **Ken Freund**

FROM AN EXPERT

THE DINGHY DOWNLOAD

A guide to the fine art of towing a toad.

Once you're settled into a campground—leveled your rig, put out the awning and hooked up with power, water and sewer, extended the steps, covered the windshield and whatever else—the last thing you want to do is break camp. But you just found out you don't have a key ingredient for dinner and need to go into town. Or you discovered the tourist attraction you want to visit doesn't allow RV parking.

Some folks find bicycles or lightweight motorcycles sufficient for running errands and local visiting. But a lot of motorhome owners prefer to tow a vehicle along with them, a practice called "dinghy towing." Millions of travelers do this, availing themselves of the convenience of an extra set of wheels. Some affectionately call the towed vehicle a "toad."

Before you run out and impulse-buy a vehicle to tow, whether it's used or new, it's essential to determine a few things. First: How much weight is your motorhome rated to tow? You can often find the motorhome's tow rating in the manufacturer's specifications (or check with them). If the info is not available, start with the Gross Combination Weight Rating (GCWR). This should be on a label in the door jamb. Subtract the actual weight (fully fueled and loaded RV weight, including water and passengers) from the GCWR. For example, if the GCWR is 25,000 pounds and the actual fully loaded scale weight is 20,000 pounds, you have 5,000 pounds left available for towing. Do a Google search for "truck scales near me" for scale locations.

You will need a hitch. Many motorhomes come with a trailer hitch, which is rated for up to 5,000 pounds. That's enough for towing most cars, but not sufficient for all pickups and SUVs. Check to ensure that your prospective hitch has sufficient rating for what you will be towing. Look up the manufacturer's curb weight for an estimate of what your

WINNEBAGO

Dinghy towing is an increasingly popular practice, helping unlock adventures beyond camp.

proposed dinghy vehicle may weigh, and add for any cargo.

Next, is the vehicle you are considering designed and manufacturer-approved to be towed long distances? Many vehicles are not. Towing them can lead to extremely expensive mechanical damage. Read the towing section of your prospective toad's owner's manual for instructions on how to tow it.

There are several Dinghy Towing Guides available online, with listings organized by model year. These can be helpful in narrowing down what vehicle to use or to determine if one you already have is towable. These are found at Roadmasterinc.com, CampingWorld.com and others. (*Wildsam*'s sister website, RV.com, also has an extensive archive of dinghy-related material.)

There are three basic methods for bringing a vehicle along: on a trailer; on a tow dolly; or "flat towing," with all four wheels on the ground. Most folks prefer flat towing for its simplicity and convenience. But the paradox here is, the majority of vehicles are not flat towable, so be very cautious and make sure of what's possible. If your towed vehicle has front-wheel drive and is thus not flat towable, you may need a tow dolly. If it is electric, has all-wheel drive or is otherwise not designed to be flat-towed, it may need to be hauled on a trailer.

In order to flat tow, you'll need a mount to connect the tow bar to the towed vehicle. These are called baseplates and mount to the front structure of the vehicle, providing a solid place to attach a tow bar. Most baseplates are made by a few companies, including Blue Ox, Roadmaster and Demco. You'll also need a tow bar, and these are made by the above-mentioned companies as well as NSA RV Products (nsarvproducts.com) and some others. Make sure the tow bar is rated for the actual loaded weight of your dinghy vehicle, and that it's compatible with the model baseplate you are using. Many folks prefer the type of tow bar that is left attached to the motorhome when the dinghy vehicle is detached.

Now that you have the basics, in our next issue we will cover the various accessories and widgets that make dinghy towing safer and easier. Stay tuned! *Written by Ken Freund*

Jerry A. Edwards worked up from sweeping floors to changing the towing game.

KING OF THE ROAD

How Roadmaster's founder blazed a trail in the RV industry.

Growing up in Tooele, Utah, Jerry A. Edwards had little inclination that he'd spend nearly seven decades of his professional life in the RV industry. His dad was a deep shaft miner, and most of his days were spent hanging around the jobsite. It wasn't until he was 15 that he landed a job sweeping factory floors at VistaLiner, a truck camper manufacturer that brought him across state lines to Idaho.

Within six months, he'd engineered a new method to build cabinets for the campers. VistaLiner's owner then put him in the metal shop, where he thrived. By age 18, he was the plant supervisor for a new company, Freeway Campers, and in the early 1960s he moved to Oregon, where he became the manager for Aloha Trailers. He was only 21 when he launched his own service and repair shop, Vetro. "I'm not sure I even stepped inside an RV until I worked at VistaLiner," says Edwards, who, at 82 years old, is still working. "But for not having planned it, I couldn't have landed in a better industry."

Amidst the gas crisis of the 1970s, as many RV manufacturers struggled to keep their doors open, Edwards saw an opportunity. He purchased and sold repossessed RVs, scaling his business despite the headwinds of the marketplace. "You had to be a very good salesman to sell a 6-mpg motorhome when gas was rationed," he recalls.

Edwards' niche would ultimately be aftermarket accessories, a speciality that would lead to his next and most prolific enterprise: a company we know today as Roadmaster, Inc. Shortly after Edwards founded Roadmaster in Vancouver, Washington, he released a product that revolutionized flat towing. The Stowmaster Tow Bar, which debuted in 1984, was the world's first self-aligning tow bar.

That product was the foundation of a business that, more than 40 years on, is still the leader in flat-towing products. But Edwards knows the industry is changing, that younger travelers seek out smaller rigs that don't require tow bars. Even at age 82, he's ready to meet that challenge. "Our roots are innovation and the ability to create things from scratch," he says. "We'll create products for the changing demographic and continue the Roadmaster legacy."

Written by Jay Bouchard

LEFT TO RIGHT) ROADMASTER INC. (2); GETTY IMAGES

ASK AN EXPERT

SOLAR CONTROLLER CONUNDRUM

Q: We have a solar panel on our 2024 Autumn Ridge 19-foot camper made by StarCraft. We really don't understand how to read the display panel inside the camper; it shows different numbers at different times. Currently we do not have a battery in the camper, but we are in the process of getting a new one. Any info would help.
—Anna Gabriele, Wilmington, IL

A: You have a Go Power! Brand model GP-SB-PWM 30 BT solar controller by Dometic. According to the manufacturer, it is a 12-volt flush-mounted, single-bank, photo-voltaic (PV) charge controller rated for a continuous solar current input of 30 amps. It features Bluetooth performance for remote system monitoring. Using the free Go Power! Connect app, you can connect to your SB-PWM-30BT controller to set the battery type and charging profile. Toggle Maximum Power Boost mode and view essential battery stats. These include Battery Voltage, PV Charging, Current and Battery State of Charge (SOC). You can download the app for either Apple or Android phones at no charge.

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COUPLES RETREAT

The perfect RVs for two, plus the occasional guest.

Compact but well-appointed, these campers are built for two, making them the ideal escape pods for weekend getaways and extended adventures.

Winnebago Thrive 24RKS
The latest edition to the Winnebago towable line-up, the Thrive delivers a lot of value in a sleek, modern package. The 24RKS floor plan is especially attractive for couples, offering a primary bedroom suite that includes a queen-size bed, built-in wardrobes, a spacious closet and a private entrance. The rest of the rig is impressive, too, with a large bathroom, a well-equipped kitchen and theater seating for two. Should you want to bring a few friends along, the dinette converts to a second bed, providing room for four in a pinch. And with an overall length of 29' 4" and a GVWR of 8,800 pounds, this rig delivers a residential feel that remains easy to tow. MSRP: $55,230 *winnebago.com*

Coachmen Euro 25EU
All three of the Coachmen Euro's floor plans seem custom-made for couples, but the 25EU model is especially appealing. This Class A comes with a king bed, a modern RV kitchen and a living area with a couch and versatile dining space. The motorhome also features a roomy bathroom and washer/dryer prep, along with multiple closets, a pantry and overhead cabinets. Best of all, thanks to its small size, the coach is very easy to drive, even for beginner RVers. MSRP: $159,999 *coachmenrv.com*

Jayco Granite Ridge 22T
Designed with far-roaming couples in mind, the Granite Ridge 22T rides on an AWD Ford Transit chassis with all-terrain tires, allowing it to safely venture off-road. A 2,800W self-starting generator and 360W of solar come standard, making this a boondocking beast. Inside, you'll find twin beds, a roomy wet bath and a dinette/lounge combo. This rig only sleeps two, though, so guests will have to settle for a tent outside. MSRP: $226,043 *jayco.com*

Keystone Cougar Half-Ton 22MLS
This travel trailer is the quintessential couples camper, offering everything you need in a compact—yet comfortable—space. Standard features include a king-size bed, a booth dinette, theater seating and an open kitchen complete with a microwave, 12V refrigerator and a Furrion stove with a three-burner cooktop. The 26' 10" towable comes with a surprising amount of storage, including a pull-out pantry, exterior cargo bays, and drawers under the bed. MSRP: $47,760 *keystonerv.com*

(LEFT TO RIGHT) WINNEBAGO; COACHMEN RV; JAYCO RV; KEYSTONE RV; GETTY IMAGES (3); RAM TRUCKS

VOICES FROM THE ROAD

FALL TRAVEL TIPS

"The eastern side of the **SIERRA NEVADA** range [395 corridor] is beautiful in the fall."
—Neighborhood No4274, Reddit

"**BRIDGER-TETON AND FISHLAKE** national forests are both really cool, with a mix of pine and aspen trees, and lots of wild flowers and lakes."
—ants_taste_great, Reddit

"The **TAMARACKS** in the North Cascades."
—Skiberrjr, Reddit

ASK AN EXPERT

RAM RECALL

Ram trucks are subject to a recall involving 68,809 pickups for faulty trailer reverse steering control modules. This can affect trailerists significantly. Ram 1500 (DT) pickup trucks manufactured from 2021 to 2023, as well as 2023 Ram 2500 (DJ) pickups are included in the recall. Dealers will update the TRSCM software, free of charge. If your vehicle is within that range and you haven't received a recall notice, contact your local dealer. Owners may also contact Stellantis customer service at 1-800-853-1403. The number for this recall is 14A.

VOICES FROM THE ROAD

Instagram: @oureverydaygetaway
Vehicle: 2018 Holiday Rambler Endeavor XE 38K (Class A motorhome) with a 2024 Jeep Wrangler Rubicon nicknamed "Mystique" in tow.

RIDING ALONG WITH...

CHRIS + KATRINA BELLOFATTO

"Our journey into RV life really started through a series of tragedies. In 2013, our lives changed forever. Our daughter Casey, who was 18 at the time, was in a horrific accident. She suffered burns over 60 percent of her body, had four strokes, and sustained multiple injuries. As a result, she lost both of her legs above the knee. Her recovery was long and incredibly difficult—it took years. At some point after that journey, we were planning a family vacation, and the idea of renting an RV came up again. After everything we had been through, we had a different perspective on life. We told ourselves: Let's stop talking about doing things someday—and just do them. We rented a Class A motorhome and headed out west for two unforgettable weeks. Not long after that, we bought our first RV: a used 2016 Thor Hurricane 29M. Class A. Then, in September 2020—just two months after I retired—I was diagnosed with throat cancer. I underwent chemo and radiation at Johns Hopkins, finishing treatment in March 2021. And after coming through all of that, we looked at each other and said, 'Life is just too short.' We sold our house, and we hit the road full-time."

What's the best piece of gear you've used on the road?
"Starlink has been an absolute game-changer for us. We've traveled all across the United States and Canada, including some incredibly remote areas during our trip to Alaska, and, honestly, I don't know what we would've done without it. In the three years we've been using it, we've only run into issues once or twice, and that was due to heavy tree coverage."

What is your best piece of advice for someone looking to flat-tow a vehicle?
"Make sure to have a good hook-up system, like Blue OX or Roadmaster. Always make sure to take your time when hooking up everything. Do not rush and never hesitate to double check all connections. Also, when you make a stop, do a walk around and check your connections and safety lines."

CAMP KEEPERS

NAMES
JIM AND DANA DIVIS

CAMPGROUND
THE PARK AT LONE POINT CELLARS

LOCATION
BREWSTER, WASHINGTON

"Jim and Dana own Lone Point Cellars, up in North-Central Washington near the banks of the Columbia River, equidistant from Seattle and Spokane. Jim started planting tree crops in 1984, and in 2019 he expanded and opened a vineyard. At that time, we also opened The Cottages, six modern vacation rentals walking distance from the grape vines. But over the years we started getting feedback from people who thought it would be great if we also had spots for RVs on the property. So, brand new this year, we took five acres and built 20 premium RV sites in an area we call 'The Park.'

"The Park is nestled in-between the vineyard and Jim's cherry trees, still walking distance from everything on the property, including our tasting house and restaurant. The Park includes pickleball courts, a play area for kids, a putting green, and, soon, a hiking trail through the orchard. Every site is outfitted with a propane fire pit, because wildfire is a concern during the warmer months.

"We really lean into agritourism here. And nearby there are a number of other attractions. Sockeye salmon season on the Columbia brings people to the area; we have freezers our guests can use to store their catch. There's also a world-class golf resort, Gamble Sands, just down the road. But no matter the reason people come, we want it to feel like a privilege to stay with us." *– As told to* Wildsam *by Marcus McCoy, guest services manager at Lone Point Cellars*

(LEFT TO RIGHT) CHRIS AND KATRINA BELLOFATTO; SPENCER WIRKKALA; DAVE AND TANYA VIRNELLI

HIT THE ROAD WITH...

BRADY + BAILEY

"We have two cats traveling around with us—Brady, an 11-year-old Maine Coon, and Bailey, who is six years old. They're both rescues. We used to fly around, but when the pandemic happened we started RVing and brought them along. It really wasn't a difficult transition–both of them love it. Bailey is very curious, in particular, but harnesses don't work on either cat. They get limp or they scream. But what we love about our Winnebago Ekko is that we have huge windows in the back for them to look out of. Whenever we start the engine, Bailey knows we're about to leave and she actually just runs into her crate and sleeps for the duration. Brady, whenever we start moving, just sits in the dinette area and once we hit the highway he rolls up into one of our laps. They have their patterns, and they get along really well. Especially at night, they're always playing. These days, we're 'most-timing' on the road. We got a small apartment in Las Vegas where we spend time, a place where the kitties can stretch and run around a bit, though we're still on the road most months of the year." *–Dave and Tanya Virnelli of @turnitupworld*

3 PET POINTERS FROM
BRADY + BAILEY

① "We had special screens made for our rig. The typical RV and camper van screens are so delicate, so we had custom screens made that Velcro on top of the window and the cats' claws can't go through them."

② "There are pockets in our rig where we can make cat doors and make lit-tle spaces for the cats. We made a lot of decisions based on the kitties, and they're one of the biggest reasons we decided on the Winnebago Ekko."

③ "Our cats are indoor cats. They'll walk right up to our door and lay down, but they never go outside. Cats aren't really designed for har-nesses, so if you want to use that we'd recommend you start early."

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RECIPE

Tucker Ballister, content strategist with Camping World and author of *Easy Camping Cocktails: Pre-Batch Recipes for Tasty, On-the-Go Drinks*, says the best part of the book-making process came in adapting recipes to different types of campers. "Thinking through the adaptations for backpackers versus car campers versus those camping in an RV or cabin allowed me to approach classic—and not-so-classic—cocktail recipes from a new perspective," he says. "From investigating dry substitutes for lime that worked for a backcountry margarita to considering how batches could be made at home and safely transported, I enjoyed the process of making the recipes work even when the standard cocktail tools of home aren't at your disposal."

Making spiced simple syrup

Combine sugar and water in a saucepan and place over medium heat. Stir occasionally until the sugar is completely dissolved. Add all remaining ingredients and reduce the heat to low. Cover and simmer for 30 minutes. Remove from heat and strain through a fine-mesh sieve to discard solids. Pour into a sealed storage container and keep refrigerated. Pro Tip: You can do this step at home and transport the syrup to camp. This minimizes prep time and makes it work for car camping and RVing, provided you can keep the syrup chilled.

At the campsite

Add a strip of orange rind and a teaspoon of spiced simple syrup to each camping mug or old-fashioned glass. Muddle thoroughly. Add 1.5 ounces of rum and two dashes of bitters to each. Stir well. Add a handful of ice cubes and garnish with a maraschino cherry, if you prefer.

On-the-go tip: To minimize spills, store your simple syrup in a secure, sealed container before storing it in your camping cooler or RV fridge.

Easy Camping Cocktails: Pre-Batch Recipes for Tasty, On-the-Go Drinks *is available from many online retailers, including Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Target.*

Spiced Rum Old Fashioned

Tools: Medium saucepan, fine-mesh sieve, insulating camping mug or old-fashioned glass, muddler
Serves: 4

For the Spiced Simple Syrup:

- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup water
- ½ teaspoon whole cloves
- ½ teaspoon black peppercorns
- 1 vanilla bean
- 1 star anise pod
- 1 cinnamon stick

For the Cocktail:

- 4 strips of orange rind (roughly 2 inches across)
- 4 teaspoons spiced simple syrup
- 6 ounces aged rum
- 8 dashes of bitters
- 4 maraschino cherries (optional garnish)
- Ice

(LEFT TO RIGHT) TUCKER BALLISTER; @ENDLESS_RVING

Instagram: @endless_rving
Vehicle: 2015 Newmar Dutch Star 4369

RIDING ALONG WITH...

IZZY, MJ & JASON

"We went on a work trip back in 2018 and stayed in a hotel. Unfortunately, we came back with bed bugs from the hotel. We had to live in our basement for two weeks while our house was cleared of all bed bugs. We thought about getting a trailer to stay in the driveway. We decided not to do that, and quickly chose to start RVing. We went RV shopping a couple weeks later and bought our first travel trailer, a Jayco JayFlight 28BHBE, and fell in love!"

Where are you traveling this year?
"We traveled to South Carolina and Georgia to do our battery/solar and NIRVC upgrades. We are headed to Tennessee to search for our next home, and then Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Virginia, and Florida after that. Izzy is retiring officially from law enforcement on August 31 so we will be on the road now for weeks and months at a time."

What tools and gear are your essentials?
"Zip ties and VHB tape. They come in very handy and we use them all the time."

FROM THE ARCHIVES

DINGHY FROM DAY ONE

Motorhome, March 1993:

Back in the early 1990s, *Motorhome* magazine's annual towed-vehicle guide was a sacred text for RVers. For reasons related to transmissions, steering columns and other technological peculiarities, dinghy towing doesn't work with just any vehicle, so the *Motorhome* editors undertook the painstaking work to assemble a comprehensive list of nearly every automaker's compatible tow cars, as well as the equipment needed to make it happen. The big excitement in 1993 was that Saturn cars—remember them?—finally made the list, as did GMC's Jimmy and Sonoma. But the editors always cautioned readers to do their own homework when it comes to towing specifications. "Towing is a coordinated event that involves many components working together," Brian Robertson wrote. "With proper hardware, safe driving habits, and attention to maintenance details, you'll enjoy many, many miles of safe travel."

TECH SPOTLIGHT

BRAKING NEWS

Auxiliary braking systems are key for dinghy drivers.

The stakes are high enough when you drive a motorhome. And with your several-thousand-pound daily driver behind it, they're even higher. Cruising the highway, you wouldn't be the first person to worry: Is my car still back there? What if we hit a bump? And what happens if I have to slam the brakes?

Dinghy towing has evolved over decades to put many such worries to rest. And when it comes to that last question—stopping power—auxiliary braking systems are designed to slow your tow vehicle at the same speed as your coach, which when combined with a tow bar, prevents your car from blasting through the back of your rig in an emergency. "From a very high level, auxiliary braking is the safest thing you can do aside from the tow bar," says Doug Northcutt, RV towing products sales manager at Demco. "It makes the coach stop much quicker, and it helps people come to a stop 35 to 45 percent faster in a panic zone."

(LEFT TO RIGHT) MOTORHOME; GETTY IMAGES

Auxiliary braking systems are required in most states, but the technology varies based on the manufacturer, the type of rig you drive, and whether or not you want the system permanently mounted in your tow vehicle. Here, we look at the most common systems and the brands behind them.

The Air Force One and the Stay-IN-Play DUO from Demco

Demco has been a leader in towed-vehicle technology since the company was founded in 1964. And these days, coach manufacturers like Freightliner, Tiffin, and Spartan build chassis specifically to be compatible with Demco's auxiliary braking systems.

For diesel rigs, the Air Force One uses a pilot signal connected to the coach's air brakes that delivers a proportional response to the towed vehicle, ensuring the dinghy brakes at exactly the same speed as the motorhome. "You just have to hook up the air hose and you're off to the races," Northcutt says. For gas motorhomes (without air brakes), Demco's Stay-IN-Play DUO system uses the inertia from the towed vehicle, combined with the coach's brake light signal, to create a proportional response in the dinghy's brakes.

NSA RV Products ReadyBrake

While some systems rely on electronics and air to trigger the brakes, the Ready Brake system from NSA is fully mechanical. So, when you slow your motorhome, the weight of the dinghy vehicle pushes forward on the hitch-mounted ReadyBrake system, triggering an actuating arm that is connected to the towed-vehicles brakes.

Roadmaster Brakemaster System

The Brakemaster system from Roadmaster connects and disconnects from a towed vehicle in less than one minute, which means the system is not always in place. Instead, one end of the Brakemaster connects to the air or hydraulic lines of your coach, while the other is installed on the floor in front of the towed-vehicle's driver seat. When you hit the brakes of your motorhome, a proportional response is applied to the dinghy brakes.

Blue Ox Patriot 3

Like the Brakemaster system, the Blue Ox Patriot series is not permanently mounted in the towed vehicle; rather, it attaches to the brake pedal and sits on the floor. What makes it different, though, is that it's entirely electric, relying on an actuator that senses the braking force of the coach. *–written by Jay Bouchard*

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MEMPHIS, TENNESEE

If you're walking in Memphis—or cruising on Highway 79—the Bar-B-Q Shop calls out for a visit with many enticements. Home of the dancing pigs? Tell us more. And as is so often the way in this city at the crossroads of American culture, there is much more to tell. To visit here is to step into an intergenerational story that starts with a man named Brady Vincent, who later sold to a family name of Vernon, and includes the invention of barbecue spaghetti, destined to become a saucy staple. Sit down with Eric Vernon, the latest to take the helm, and he'll tell you tales: "Brady used to be a railroad cook … From the early '60s, he fed Stax, he fed the Beatles. Anybody who was in law enforcement drove down to South Memphis." That's the lore, or a drizzle of it. The next chapter about this spot is up to you.

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