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Quick Tips for the Exterior Care of your Motorhome Fifth Wheel or Travel Trailer

- **Bugs and bird droppings on your paint** , grillwork and windshield? Saturate the area with spray cooking oil, let it sit for 10 minutes then wash the windshield as usual. To remove salt deposits from a painted metal RV exterior, wash with a solution of baking soda and warm water. For extra heavy stains, make a baking soda paste and rub on with a damp sponge. Rinse well. Wash your RV on a cloudy day or in the shade. Use warm but not hot water, as hot water can bleach paint.
- **Clean your RV from the top down** so that you're following the direction of gravity. If you can, clean the roof too so that dirt doesn't run down the sides during rain and heavy dew.
- **WD-40 serves as an alternative to commercial bug & tar remover** on the oily road buildup that accumulates on the lower panels of your RV. Wash the RV as usual after application.
- To make your tires look like new, scrub them clean with soap and water using a hard bristle brush, then apply self-polishing floor wax.
- **To clean tough spots on your windows**, wipe down with rubbing alcohol, allow to dry, then clean as usual.
- **Renew your windshield wiper blades** by cleaning with a low-abrasion scouring powder then wiping them with rubbing alcohol. Makes the wipers last longer and stops them from streaking.
- **A child's wax crayon**, close to the same color, makes an effective repair to tiny scratches on your paint. Rub the crayon over the scratch, then buff smooth with a clean cloth.

Basic Precautions for Transporting a Safe and

Healthy Horse on Short or Long Trips

by James Hamilton, DVM and Neva Kittrell Scheve

Each time a horse enters a trailer he is at risk. He may receive minor bumps and bruises just from being loaded onto the trailer. He may injure himself during the trip because he becomes frightened or loses balance. Illness or a trailer accident can create a life threatening situation. Anytime the horse is loaded into a trailer, whether for a short or long trip, these fundamental measures should be taken:

TRAINING. The best defense against injury and illness is good training. Train your horse to load calmly and to accept the trailer as non-threatening. Forceful training will only teach your horse that the trailer is a bad thing and he will never be able to completely trust it.

MAKE SURE YOUR TRAILER IS SAFE. Once your horse has been trained to trust you and the trailer, don't let him down. Only use the proper hitch, make sure your brakes and lights are working and that they conform to legal safety standards. Check the trailer floor and frame. Check for sharp edges and potential hazards inside and out.

DRIVE CAREFULLY. Remember that you have live cargo in the trailer and drive accordingly. Don't jostle your horse around. Turn corners carefully and give the horse warning by GENTLY braking a few times before you are going to make a turn. Accelerate and decelerate slowly so he can keep his balance.

INNOCULATIONS. Current inoculations will protect your horse from exposure to other horses. Have a current health certificate if you are crossing state lines and a current certificate of negative EIA (Coggins)

WRAP ALL FOUR LEGS. Just walking onto the trailer can result in injury if the horse scrapes against something, so wrap his legs every time your horse gets on the trailer. Commercial shipping wraps are easy to put on and can guard against a costly vet bill. Properly applied standing bandages give more support if the trailer is bumpy or the trip is long. The pastern and coronet band should be covered. Make sure you know how to wrap correctly because a bad wrap can cause injury or come undone in the trailer. (Note: Some people believe that they should not wrap a horse's legs because commercial shipping companies do not allow the horses to be wrapped for shipping and they believe the shipping company has a reason for it. They do have a reason - the shippers do not want to be held responsible for a wrap that comes undone, or a wrap that is improperly applied and causes injury, not because it is best for the horse.)

VENTILATION. Horses are very sensitive to dust and noxious gasses; i.e., ammonia from urine and manure. Open the vents and windows. If you are afraid he will get cold, put a blanket on him that is appropriate for the temperature. Do not let him get too hot. An overheated horse is susceptible to illness such as dehydration which can lead to heat exhaustion and/or colic.

CARRY AN EMERGENCY FIRST AID KIT. Keep it in your trailer and make sure it is always ready and up to date. Include a splint and know how to use it. (For more information, read "[Emergency First Aid Kit](#)")

LEARN PROPER FIRST AID OF TECHNIQUES. Learn how to bandage wounds in various locations, control blood loss, and learn to recognize signs of dehydration, heat exhaustion, and colic. Your own veterinarian is your best source of information.

LEARN TO MONITOR VITAL SIGNS IN THE HORSE. Practice taking his temperature, pulse, and respiration rate when you are both relaxed at

home so you know what is normal. If your horse is sick or hurt, you can give the veterinarian the current vital signs when you call. This will help him/her assess the situation and give you good advice on the phone.

CARRY BACKUP SUPPLIES APPROPRIATE TO THE LENGTH OF THE TRIP. Water (At least 20 gallons, not only for drinking, but for cleaning wounds, or sponge bathing an overheating horse), plenty of hay and grain, blankets, etc. Having an auxiliary light that plugs into the cigarette lighter and a backup flashlight with working batteries on board is a good idea. Keep in mind that your trip may be longer than planned due to unforeseen circumstances. You may have a mechanical breakdown, get caught in a traffic jam, or you may simply get lost! (For more information, read "[Don't Go on the Road Without it - Emergency check list](#)")

CARRY MEDICAL ID. You should always carry durable, visible, medical ID that lists your doctor, your veterinarian, and a contact person. If you are incapacitated in an accident, it can be important to contact someone who knows you and your horses.

For long trips (12 hours or more), you may want to take more specific precautions.

Get to know your horse. His age, condition, temperament, and environmental factors may change the 12 hour rule for taking aggressive precautions to a 6 or 8 hour rule. If, for instance, your horse will not drink water on the trailer you may have to schedule stops along the way where you can SAFELY take him off the trailer for a rest and a drink.

The following are guidelines, not absolutes. Use them as a starting point for a discussion between you and your veterinarian. Your best source of advice is your own vet. Develop a good relationship with him/her.

ELECTROLYTES. Increase 2 to 3 days prior to shipping. This is most important when traveling in warm regions. Some horses may not drink if electrolytes and mineral supplements are added to the water. Adding them to the feed or using a paste formula is a better plan since anything to discourage water consumption is obviously detrimental to the traveling animal. Follow directions on your particular product label for amounts.

BRAN MASH. Once a day for 2-3 days prior to shipping.

VITAMINS. Add extra for a week prior to shipping.

MINERAL OIL. One pint per day may either be added to feed along with bran mash for four days prior, OR given by a veterinarian via stomach tube the day of shipping 4-6 hours before departure. There are differing professional opinions about this, so discuss this with your veterinarian.

ANTIBIOTICS. When the trip will be over 12 hours, discuss the administration of antibiotics with your veterinarian.

BODY CLIP. When taking your horse from a cold climate to a warm one, a body clip is recommended. However, since clipping is a source of stress for the horse, do it at least a week before departure, and if it's cold, blanket him.

BLANKET. The need for a blanket will depend on the temperature en route. You may need to add or remove it along the way. Do not completely close up the trailer to keep the horse warm, especially if the trailer is insulated. Some vents and/or windows should remain open for ventilation.

Acme or POL valve required for RV propane cylinders & cylinder re-certification

The Federal government prohibited the sale and use of POL valves found on older DoT type propane cylinders. (POL is an abbreviation for Prest-O-Lite, for the company that first produced the valve). These valves have the familiar female left-hand-thread in the valve and are the type most of us currently have. Cylinders with this type valve were discontinued beginning in the year 2000, and may no longer be refilled.

The old POL valves were replaced by a new Acme type which uses a QCC (Quick Closing Coupling) connector. This connector has an external (male) right-hand thread on the valve. A pigtail hose can be connected and disconnected by hand... no wrench required. These valves also have the old-style POL internal left-hand thread, so they can be used directly in place of the old valves without modifying your RV. If you like the no-tools convenience of new style connector you may want to replace your pigtail hoses with new ones having the QCC connectors.

The new ACME or QCC valve also contains an OPD (Overfill Protection Device). So you may find them called ACME valves, OPD valves or QCC valves, depending on the supplier. The OPD feature prevents accidental overfill of the cylinder. An internal float mechanism shuts off the valve when the propane tank is 80% filled. The 20% empty space is necessary to prevent the cylinder from venting large amounts of propane when the temperature rises. (ASME type cylinders in most motorhomes have had this OPD feature for many years). The new OPD valve also contains another safety feature - it will not release gas unless the pigtail hose is properly connected, even with the valve open.

POL Valves

The old-style cylinder valve is known as a POL valve, named for the manufacturer that devised it. You tighten the connector of the regulator pigtail by turning the fitting counter-clockwise, and you usually need to use a wrench to make the connection tight enough to prevent leaks. With a POL valve, if you open it with no fitting attached, propane is freely released. That's why a plug is required to be screwed into the valve during transport of the cylinder and when it is stored or not connected to your RV. The plug is an attempt to prevent an accidental opening of the valve from creating a dangerous situation.

This valve also has a built-in bleeder valve the service technician uses to check for proper filling and a pressure relief device to prevent over pressurization of the cylinder.

ACME Valves

This valve is also known as QCC (Quick Closing Coupling) or OPD (Overfill Protection Device) The New ACME valve looks bulkier because there are external threads visible. The external threads don't necessarily require a change to the connector on the end of the regulator pigtail hose. They are compatible, as the left-hand-thread fitting on your RV regulator will screw into the internal POL threads of the new ACME valve.

However, one of the benefits of the new connector is that it is designed to be attached to the cylinder without tools. You only have to hand-tighten the connector. And, you tighten as you would normally tighten a threaded

fitting, by turning it to the right (clock-wise). So at the cost of a few dollars it may be good to replace the pigtail hoses.

Propane Cylinder Re-certification

If you have an older RV, you should know that according to Federal law, DoT cylinders may only be used for 12 years after their manufacture date. After that, the cylinders must be "re-certified" which provides another five years of use. The cylinders can be re-certified every five years thereafter.

Propane dispensers are legally required to look at the date stamped on the cylinder before filling it. Some dealers actually do look. We've been reminded a few times that our cylinders were about to expire. Check the date stamped on your cylinders... don't rely on your rig's model year even if the cylinders are original. It's quite possible they are a year or more older than your rig. Ours were.

Re-certification is usually done by the large bulk propane suppliers but we found one of our local RV repair shops was certified to do the job and they do it for free! Call around to see who may do it in your area.

Here are some things to think about:





RVs: Road to Recovery

Motor Homes • Fifth-Wheel Trailers • Travel Trailers

As the RV industry fights to recover from depleted sales, familiar manufacturers and many dealerships have gone under. Prices have vaulted, and great deals are scarce. Nonetheless, you still will find innovation among the latest motor homes, fifth-wheel trailers and travel trailers, including all-composite construction and outdoor kitchens.

If you plan to buy an RV this year, it means that you survived the economic crisis better than some RV manufacturers and dealerships did. So when you start to search for a new motor home, fifth-wheel trailer (fifth wheel) or travel trailer, you can't rely necessarily on the "who's who" of RVs. Instead, you might find yourself asking "who's that?" or even "who's there?" Struggling sales forced many RV builders to go belly-up. In addition, some manufacturers merged with or were acquired by other manufacturers. And the dealerships that remain aren't desperate to cut you great deals, unlike 4 years ago.

Yet innovation isn't a casualty of the RV-industry avalanche. One of the newest manufacturers introduced lightweight fifth wheels and travel trailers that have shells and other components that are made out of composite materials. And the latest trailers have outdoor kitchens that allow you to enjoy the great outdoors while you cook. To top it off, shopping for a new RV on the Internet has become more common, yet it poses new obstacles for consumers before they hit the highway.

DRIVING FOR DEALS. The economic downturn hit the RV market hard. Seven national motor-home manufacturers and seven national manufacturers of fifth wheels or travel trailers have gone out of business since 2008, according to our analysis. In a few cases, former employees created companies from the ashes of the old manufacturers, which means that brands exist that have products that are built in the same factories as before and that are based on construction templates that were used for the previous brand. Experts tell us that those new companies build RVs that are just as good or even better than what the old company made.

For instance, just as Pilgrim International was poised to introduce the first towable RV that had a shell that was made entirely out of composite materials, the manufacturer went out of business in August 2008. So former employees created Evergreen Recreational Vehicles and bought some of Pilgrim's tooling, materials and prototypes to follow through on the

composite trailers, which we'll discuss later.

However, although the worst of the fallout from the economic crisis has passed for the RV industry, annual shipments to dealers remain down 37 percent from the industry peak in 2006. And the economic factors that created the sales slump still exist, experts say. The result is that the RV industry has been forced to confront reality in the same way that the makers of automobiles and motorcycles have—by cutting production, so dealerships can trim bloated inventories.

The consequence for consumers is simple: RV dealers no longer are drowning in too much inventory, which they were 4 years ago, so the incentive for dealers to slash prices (to unload inventory) isn't as great. Even if you can find discounts that are as high as 30 percent for motor homes or as high as 20 percent for fifth wheels or travel trailers, those savings could be diluted by the fact that MSRPs generally have increased from 4 years ago. We found MSRP hikes as high as 25 percent on some models compared with the previous versions 4 years ago. In other words, regardless of what deal you might strike, it's likely that you still will pay significantly more for a new RV today than you would have in 2008.

And depending on where you live, you might have to drive farther than ever before to find an RV dealer. At least 25 percent fewer dealers are open now than existed 4 years ago, according to Statistical Surveys, which is a market-analysis company for RVs, boats and manufactured homes. It's possible that what once might have been a 50-mile drive to an RV dealer that sells your preferred brand now could be a daylong road trip. Experts say that could motivate more people to shop online. But don't jump to the conclusion that buying online equates to getting a better deal than at the dealership.

MATERIAL ISSUES. In 2008, Pilgrim had a concept model of the first trailer to use composite materials, but the company indicated that it would take at least 2 more years for it to create a production model. Although Pilgrim went out of business in August 2008, the first such trailer nonetheless arrived ahead of schedule in November 2009 after former Pilgrim employees and other investors created Evergreen. Evergreen has three travel trailers and one fifth wheel that wrap the trailer's aluminum frame in seamless fiberglass-reinforced polyester exterior panels. Although trailers that are from other manufacturers have fiberglass exterior panels (or aluminum panels), those panels are bonded to thin sheets of wood. Evergreen bonds its exterior fiberglass panels to a thick sheet of plastic that's called CompositTek, which is lighter and more resistant to water damage than wood is. As a result, Evergreen's composite trailers are significantly lighter than are all other similar-size trailers. For example, the 27-foot, 4-inch version of Evergreen's Ever-Lite travel trailer has an unloaded vehicle weight of 4,342 pounds, which is at least 1,800 pounds lighter than are all other travel trailers of the same size.

Benefit No. 1 of the lighter trailer, of course, is better fuel economy. We found no formula that determines how towing weight affects fuel economy. But based on the independent experts whom we interviewed and Environmental Protection Agency data, we estimate that towing a trailer that weighs 1,500 pounds less could boost your fuel economy by about 3 mpg.

Evergreen also says its all-composite trailers are less likely to rot or get mold, because moisture has fewer places to seep inside of its trailers' frames than it has with models that are made out of traditional construction materials. Independent composite-materials experts and RV service-center experts whom we interviewed say Evergreen's claims hold, er ... repel, water.

"Unchecked water damage can destroy a new trailer in a matter of months," says Jim Jussila of I-5 Uhlmann RV in Chehalis, Wash., which sells Dutchmen, Evergreen, Forest River and Winnebago RVs. "An all-composite trailer has the potential to outlast a conventional trailer by

decades.”

Other service experts tell us that repairing scratches or gashes on the trailer’s composite shell won’t cost more money or time than will similar repairs for traditional trailers.

Another difference that you’ll notice about Evergreen’s trailers is the price. You can expect to pay about 7 percent more for its models than you would for similar-size models and their traditional construction. For instance, the Evergreen Ever-Lite, which is a Best Buy selection, costs at least \$1,880 more than similar-size trailers that have shells that are made out of traditional materials. Nevertheless, we believe that it will be just a matter of time before other trailer-makers follow Evergreen’s lead.

INSIDE OUT. Of course, RV manufacturers have become creative in other ways. For example, outdoor kitchens are showing up on midrange and premium models of mostly travel trailers, but a few fifth wheels have them, too. These outdoor kitchens are a far cry from the grills and mini fridges that were stored in cargo areas in older models. The first outdoor kitchen that was on a towable trailer was introduced in 2009 by Prime Time; numerous manufacturers followed suit. Most outdoor kitchens include a pullout gas range that has at least two burners, a mini fridge, a sink and storage cabinets.

However, to make room to store an outdoor kitchen, manufacturers reduced interior space in already-small bathrooms or in bedrooms. For instance, Jayco and Prime Time models that have an outdoor kitchen have a single bed instead of a bunk bed. Trailers that have outdoor kitchens cost at least \$23,000 and are at least 25 feet long.

And when it’s time to clean up your kitchen (or anything else), you now have a new option for getting hot water. Tankless water heaters were introduced for use in RVs in 2010. You can expect to pay at least \$44 and as much as \$214 to add a tankless water heater as an upgrade. The benefit of a tankless water heater is that it supplies unlimited hot water. When the tank empties on a traditional water heater, it can take 10 minutes for it to generate a new supply of hot water.

But we believe that getting high pressure and a hot shower from a tankless water heater can be difficult. Water temperature increases when it flows over heated rods. So if you increase water pressure of a shower that uses a tankless heater, the water won’t get as hot, because it isn’t exposed to heated rods for as long. That doesn’t mean that you won’t get a hot shower when you use a tankless water heater on an RV, but the water pressure likely won’t match what you’d get from a hot shower in an RV that has a storage water heater. In addition, even the best tankless water heaters increase water temperature by no more than 60 degrees Fahrenheit from its source temperature.

So if you visit extremely cold areas, such as Alaska, where the water might be just above freezing, a tankless water heater might increase the temperature to only 90 degrees or so. That’s a 10 degree drop from what typically comes out of your shower at home.

Meanwhile, interior LED lighting in RVs has increased dramatically since it was first used in 2008. LED bulbs get no hotter than 95 degrees, so they won’t melt plastic covers on RV light fixtures, which incandescent bulbs will. According to EPA, LED lighting reduces energy use by 75 percent, and it reduces overall heat output. The energy and heat reduction is significant, experts say, because a Class A motor home can have at least 80 interior light fixtures. Unfortunately, LED lighting typically won’t reduce energy costs significantly on an RV. For instance, consumers who stay in an RV park (as many do) get free electricity as part of their admission fee anyway.

At press time, LED lighting was a standard feature from only one manufacturer, Evergreen. All other manufacturers offer LED lighting as part

of an upgrade package that costs at least \$400, so until the price for LED lighting drops, we're reluctant to call it a bright idea.

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Trailer Transformation

by Chris Hemer April 30, 2015

Home-improvement shows are wildly popular these days. People just love seeing what's possible when a renovation expert gets his or her hands on an old house that has great "bones" but is simply worn out and in need of a little love. As an RVing enthusiast, you may not be aware that the very same thing is possible in your trailer — but when you think about it, it makes perfect sense. Sometimes, a rig just fits your lifestyle — it's got enough room, the floorplan is perfect, and everything works properly. But years of use have left the interior looking a little shabby, making you long for the days when it looked and smelled new inside.

Just like your home, the interior of a trailer can be upgraded, even completely remodeled to suit your needs at a fraction of the cost of a new trailer. Dave and LJ's RV Interior Design of Woodland, Washington, 30 miles north of Portland, Oregon, specializes in making older RVs new again. The company opened its doors in 2007, but brothers Dave and LJ Ast (say "Ahhst") actually were raised in the business, helping their father at his interior design company when they were growing up. Today, pretty much anything goes, including basic flooring replacement and upgrades, reupholstering, and installation of window shades, electronics, cabinetry and more. The company also has the largest RV furniture and interior products showroom on the West Coast, making the business a one-stop shop.

Typically, motorhome owners are Dave and LJ's biggest customers, so we were interested when the brothers called to let us know they were undertaking a complete fifth-wheel renovation for good customers. Originally planning just to replace the worn furniture, the traveling couple decided not to stop there and wanted to switch out the carpet, swap the sheet-vinyl flooring for Congoleum tile, create a matching backsplash and have new window shades installed as well. After about three days' work and \$10,000, the job was completed, leaving an interior that not only looked better than new but was much more comfortable and durable. No doubt, home improvement isn't just for stationary homes anymore.

Half-Ton Towing: Fact or Fiction?

by Chris Hemer

November 24, 2014

So-called half-ton-towable fifth-wheels are becoming increasingly popular for a variety of reasons. The most obvious, of course, is that a half-ton (150 or 1500 series) pickup is less expensive than a comparably equipped HD truck and consumes less fuel. A lighter duty truck is also smaller and usually rides better as well, which becomes important when driving solo. And while a lot of folks like the towing stability a fifth-wheel provides, they don't necessarily want a big trailer, so a bigger truck just doesn't make sense.

But is this new breed of lightweight fifth-wheel really towable by half-ton trucks? We've had quite a few of our readers debate that point in recent months, and a few have felt that we are helping to perpetuate the half-ton fifth-wheel myth. Their concern is that, while a 150/1500-series truck may be capable of pulling a 9,000- to 10,000-pound fifth-wheel, the truck's payload, or more importantly, the gross axle weight rating (gawr) and/or gross vehicle weight rating (gvwr) could be violated by the trailer's pin weight, which is typically 15 to 20 percent of the total weight.

It's a good point, though not necessarily a valid one. Trailer weights and truck capabilities don't live in a world of black and white, and there are always a number of variables to consider. For example, while light-duty trucks may be lumped into the same class, their capabilities vary widely, depending on how they are configured and equipped. To wit, gvwr in this category can range from 6,300 pounds all the way up to 8,200 pounds when a heavy-duty payload or towing package is specified.

Then there's the matter of intended use. The Grand Design 27RL tested in this issue had a wet weight of 8,780 pounds but a gvwr of 9,995 pounds. Is it likely that the average user is going to pack more than 1,000 pounds of belongings in a fifth-wheel that isn't designed for full-time use? Not very.

Is the average RVer going to fill the freshwater tank when they're going to stay at an RV park with full hookups? Probably not.

And what about payload? Remember, payload is the total weight of all supplies, passengers and hitch weight allowed in the tow vehicle before exceeding the gvwr. So, will the truck be carrying two people averaging 150 pounds each (the federal standard for payload capacity), or a family of four averaging 200 pounds each?

Even if you crunch the numbers, there's no way of knowing for sure that you're not facing an overload situation, unless you weigh your truck-and-trailer combination — and this is particularly true if you plan to tow a fifth-wheel with a half-ton pickup.

For example, when we ordered the Grand Design 27RL for our test, we paired it with what was the most robust half-ton tow vehicle in GM's media fleet, a 2014 Chevy Silverado High Country with a brutish 6.2-liter, 420-horsepower V-8 and a 9,500-pound tow rating. It seemed like this truck would be OK if the trailer wasn't loaded to capacity, and the truck's gvwr of 7,200 pounds and 1,957-pound payload suggested that we had a suitable match on our hands. However, when the trailer was filled with water and propane but no supplies, it weighed 8,780 pounds and had a pin weight of 1,640 pounds — leaving us with only 317 pounds of payload capacity — without passengers in the truck. So we traveled with no water in the tank, packed lightly and squeaked by for this test.

“Aha!” our detractors exclaim. “So you’re admitting that the trailer isn’t towable by a half-ton!” Not so fast. Note that the test vehicle was the best truck in GM’s media fleet but not the highest capacity half-ton it builds. That honor goes to the Double Cab standard-box 4WD with a 5.3-liter V-8 and Max

Trailer Package, which has a maximum payload of 2,270 pounds, but more importantly, a gvwr of 7,600 pounds and a rear gawr of 4,300 pounds.

We wanted to get hold of this particular truck and weigh it to find out how much weight it carried over the rear wheels, and therefore how much capacity was left over, but this exact model was not available. So, we turned to our friends at Paradise Chevrolet in Ventura, California, to help us find the next best thing: that same model but without the Max Trailer Package. Running it across the scales, the truck weighed 5,500 pounds with a full gas tank, and the weight on the rear axle was 2,200 pounds. After making the assumption that the truck will transport two people at 150 pounds each, the realistic payload was reduced from 1,676 pounds (the figure on the data tag in the doorjamb) to 1,300. Using this scenario and subtracting the actual weight on the rear axle from its 3,950-pound gawr and estimating that 100 pounds of passenger weight will end up on the rear axle, we calculated that the rear axle could handle 1,650 pounds before exceeding capacity. Based on that number alone, it would look like the truck can just handle the 1,640-pound hitch weight for our example above.

But wait. You can’t put 1,640 pounds on the rear axle without exceeding the gvwr. As determined above, the effective hitch weight that can be carried by this truck is limited to 1,300 pounds, after accounting for the realistic payload, without putting anything else in the bed, including the hitch. Therefore, hitch weight here is limited by gvwr.

The same truck with the 7,600-pound gvwr and 4,300-pound gawr — assuming that the truck will not weigh that much more — will be able to handle a hitch weight of approximately 1,800 pounds, using the same formula as above. How did we get there? We subtracted the actual weight of the truck (5,500 pounds) from the gvwr (7,600 pounds) and ended up with 2,100 pounds. From here we accounted for 300 pounds’ worth of passengers and ended up with 1,800 pounds. Again, while the rear axle can actually handle around 2,000 pounds, the realistic capacity is limited by gvwr. Nevertheless, even though the actual weight of the truck with the 7,600-pound gvwr will likely be a little higher, this truck can get by with limited loading.

Better yet, a 2014 Ford F-150 regular cab 2WD longbed with the heavy-duty payload package and EcoBoost engine has 3,100 pounds of payload capacity and a gvwr of 8,200 pounds, and the 2015 F-150, with its new aluminum body, can tow up to 12,200 pounds and has a payload of up to 3,300 pounds.

While the Ram touts superior towing muscle for its heavy-duty pickups, the numbers for its 1500-series models are actually on the weak side. Fifth-wheel towing is possible, but owners will have to equip their Ram 1500s carefully and likely have to look at shorter, lighter fifth-wheels.

As with any truck-and-trailer combination, doing your homework and choosing the right combination is important to safe towing. If you don’t exceed the gvwr, gawr, gross combined weight rating (gcwr) or tire capacity of the tow vehicle, you can successfully tow a fifth-wheel with a half-ton pickup. But one final note: Dial in a margin of safety because you’re likely to be heavier than you think.

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