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It’s a new year and we are officially kicking off another great RV camping season. For those of you who do not have an RV yet, or are contemplating upgrading your current RV this is the time of year to do it. Visit an RV show near you and check out some of the good deals offered on 2016 RV models.

Each year, about this time, I like to offer RV buyers some valuable resources and information to help make the RV buying experience go as smooth as possible. RVs are designed for fun and relaxation, and the last thing you want or need is a hasty RV buying decision to spoil the enjoyment.

Find a comfortable chair, get your favorite beverage and enjoy this issue of RV Consumer Magazine. If you have RV friends and family tell them to subscribe, and to like us on Facebook too.

Happy Camping,

Mark
Our digital RV Product Catalog puts all of our RV training products in one place, and we separate what products apply to what type of RV. For example if you own a travel trailer you can browse through the single DVD titles or go directly to the DVD value sets that apply specifically to travel trailers.

This helps accomplish two things; it eliminates the guess work as to which DVD titles go together, and it saves the RV consumer a significant amount of money with our DVD box set discounts. Our goal at RV Education 101 is simple, to help RV owners until they are comfortable operating and using their RV, and to make their entire RV experience safe, fun and stress free. [Browse the product catalog now](#)
We did not use tents in the field because a mechanized infantry battalion was always on the move and the maintenance operation had to be mobile. The truck and van combination would be used for shelter and as our operation center. On one side of the shop van we built shelving and small compartments to house hard to find parts. These parts could be used to barter with other units, and to help keep our fleet of vehicles operational during field training exercises. On the opposite side of the van we built a countertop for our radio and communications equipment, and displayed maps on the wall above it to plot and track vehicle recovery missions. In the front section of the shop van we built some crude bunk beds for me and the Battalion Maintenance Supervisor. The shop van was very sparse in amenities, but it had heat, lights and an inverter to operate the essentials like a coffee pot.

Over the course of the next three years I would spend countless days and nights running the battalion maintenance operations from that old shop van mounted on a 2 ½ ton truck. Those field training exercises were hard times, and you got very little sleep, but the memories of that old Army truck...
Truck Camper Tips

Did you know the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has certain requirements for trucks loading & carrying truck campers?

Manufacturers of trucks capable of handling a truck camper are required to provide information to owners about cargo weights and center of gravity. If your truck is not new you might be able to locate this information through an Internet search.

When considering a truck camper it is important you not only look at the manufacturer’s weight of the truck camper; you need to address the weight of any aftermarket equipment you add like awnings and electric jacks, and the weight of cargo, water and personal belongings.

Add all of this weight together and make sure it does not exceed the truck’s maximum cargo weight rating. If the weight is acceptable follow the truck manufacturer’s guidelines for the center of gravity and loading the truck camper on the truck.

A truck camper that overloads the truck or that is improperly loaded can affect the steering and braking and possibly result in an accident. ~ RV 101

Learn more about RVs & RV types before you buy with our Introduction to RVs DVD

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and shop van would evolve into the
passion I have for truck campers today.

Truck campers are equipped with all the
amenities you could want but somehow,
at least for me, bring back the basics of
camping. When we travel in our
motorhome it is similar to being at
home, but in a truck camper it seems
more utilitarian. It is smaller and more
compact, but fully functional. And as
opposed to having everything packed
that you could possibly need or want on
a camping trip you only have room for
the essentials. To me this is what makes
camping fun.

We had a nice used Lance truck
camper, but sold it and now I regret it.
One of the most enjoyable RV trips in
recent memory was a cross-country trip
we took in the truck camper. Two adults
and three dogs was challenging at
times, but it was fun and memorable.

Similar to towable trailers it is important
you have a truck that can handle the
weight of a truck camper. We just
purchased a new Ram 2500 with a 6.7L
Cummins turbo-diesel and I still need to
cautious of weights, especially with
truck campers. This year we are
planning a trip from North Carolina to
Las Vegas to attend the 2016 SEMA
and RVDA shows and from there to
Louisville, Kentucky for the National RV
Trade Show and then back home. If I
have my way it will be in another truck
camper on the back of the Ram truck!
~ RV101
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   - Each episode of this hit series provides valuable RV information!

Don’t forget to check out Mark’s Blog, our free RV101.TV site and the brand new RV DIY Channel too!

www.rvconsumer.com
How will you Remember your travels?

The laptop we would’ve used to keep in touch with the kids.

The guy from Ed’s Towing. Spent three hours with him.

Cook’s Field, the week after we missed the Bluegrass Festival.

Not all insurance is equal. Just because you have your RV insured, doesn’t mean your whole RV experience is covered. Things like personal effects coverage, vacation liability, and towing expenses are frequently left out of other carriers’ policies. But at Explorer RV, we believe it’s more than just your RV we’re covering. It’s the travels, the good times, the memories. Visit us online to learn more or to get a quote.

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Buying an RV can be confusing and intimidating, especially for the first time RV buyer. And uninformed RV buying decisions can be very costly mistakes. There are numerous types of RVs, RV manufacturers, weight issues, financing concerns and much more to deal with. I understand how overwhelming this topic can be and my goal is to provide you with some RV buying resources to help make the RV buying process less confusing. Here you will find some valuable resources to help guide you through the RV buying experience.

Select a topic you are interested in learning more about and the links will take you to a resource where you can gain valuable insight on that RV buying topic. This information is also available at our www.rvconsumer.com site.

NADA Guides
Let’s start with NADA Guides for RVs
If you plan to purchase a used RV from a dealership or a private owner the NADA guide is a valuable asset. Most RV dealers use the NADA guide for Recreation Vehicles to determine used RV pricing. Used RV prices are based on the age of the unit, the condition, options, and mileage if it’s a motorized RV. The NADA guide offers wholesale and retail pricing for used RVs, and all NADA pricing assumes the RV is in good condition, and proper working order. Go online and check the NADA price for the unit you are considering purchasing before you commit to a price. For accurate figures you will need to know the make, model, year, mileage for motorized RVs and any optional equipment on the RV.
You wouldn’t pay full Manufacturer Suggested Retail Price (MSRP) for a new RV, so you shouldn’t pay full NADA retail price for a used RV either. Some used RVs are more in demand than others, but if the used RV is in good condition and everything operates properly a fair price would be somewhere between the NADA wholesale and retail price guidelines. Just click on the link, put your zip code in and click on RVs in the top header.

**RV Loan Calculator**
The next RV buying resource I want to discuss is using a simple [RV loan calculator](https://www.rvconsumer.com/calculator) to help determine what your monthly payment will be. You don’t want to pay more than your budget allows, and knowing this information in advance will go a long way in making an educated RV buying decision.

I always recommend contacting your bank or credit union to obtain the current interest rates they charge for new or pre-owned RV loans, the maximum term (length of loan) and the amount they will loan you. Knowing this information and being pre-approved for a loan puts you in a position to negotiate the rate, term and selling price before signing any finance paperwork. Just click on the [RV loan calculator](https://www.rvconsumer.com/calculator) and plug the numbers in to see what your monthly payment will be and get an amortization table for the life of the RV loan.

**An Introduction to RVs**
Now that you are armed with this information you need to learn what types of RVs there are and what type makes the most sense for you based on your personal needs.

For this I recommend viewing our [Introduction to RVs DVD](https://www.rvconsumer.com/dvd). It is a great way to get educated on what an RV is, RV types, and which RV is right for you.

**Attend RV Shows**
Next on the list is to visit some local RV shows. Here you will get to see a wide variety of RVs, all under the same roof. You can walk through the RVs, compare models, compare pricing, attend seminars and research some local RV dealers in and around the area where you live. Keep in mind that dealing with a reputable RV dealer is a real asset too. Here is a good link to find [RV shows](https://www.rvconsumer.com/shows) close to where you live. Just select the state where you live and hit search for a list of RV shows you can attend to learn more about RVs and RVing.

**RV Manufacturers**
Now that you know what type of RV you prefer, and you had a chance to look some RVs over it’s time to research some RV manufacturers. I like to
compare RVs to cars by explaining that you can buy a Chevy, a Buick or a Cadillac. My point is there are various brands and models with different price points. You need to take time to research different RV manufacturers and determine what brand and model works best for you. It’s important to understand increases in price are driven by materials used in the construction process, and in upgraded equipment. A good example is an RV with corrugated aluminum siding would cost less than the same RV with fiberglass siding. There are lots of ways to research RV manufacturers. You can request literature, attend RV shows or do what I recommend and research on the internet in the comfort of your own home. Here is a good link to help locate RV manufacturers. You have the option to search by brand, company or by RV type.

RV Buying Guides
At this point you are almost ready to go shopping for your RV, but before you do I strongly recommend reading one or more RV buying guides. These guides take this short RV buying primer and expand on these topics exponentially. They also offer RV buying information that can literally save you thousands on your purchase, and more over the life of the RV loan. Click on the link under each guide for more information or to purchase.

Happy RV Buying in 2016 ~ RV 101
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The brakes on a tow vehicle are designed to stop the tow vehicle, not the 3, 4 or 5 ton trailer behind the truck. Stopping a 6,000 pound trailer is not something you take lightly. It is a safety issue for you, your loved ones and everyone else traveling on the same road as you.

So, your truck and trailer are properly matched, you have the correct hitch components to safely tow the trailer and you have an electronic brake controller wired to assist in stopping the trailer. But the only way to achieve optimum performance from all of these products is to ensure that everything is properly installed. If you use scotch-locks to make wire connections, rather than the correct type of sealed wire connectors all the expensive equipment in the world won’t make a difference. The same is true if you run the wrong gauge wire over a certain distance, resulting in a drop in voltage and less efficient braking. **For optimum trailer brakes everything in the brake system must be in good working order.**

In addition to proper installation of the brake controller and wiring it is important that you perform routine maintenance on the remainder of the trailer brake system. This includes but is not limited to brake & bearing component inspections based on mileage and time intervals. Check your RV and/or axle manufacturer owner manuals for more information on inspection intervals.

**Caution:** Prior to removing any tires or wheels to work on the trailer brakes certain safety procedures must be followed. The trailer needs to be parked on a hard flat level surface. The tires on the opposite side you plan to work on must be chocked to prevent any possible movement forward or backward. The trailer must be jacked up according to manufacturer instructions, and properly rated jack stands installed to support the trailer’s weight while the work is being performed.

**Note:** If you don’t feel comfortable performing this type of maintenance yourself you should have an authorized RV service center do it for you.
Your inspections should include checking the following items:

**Brake Linings**: Inspect the brake linings for wear and contamination that may affect the operation of the brakes. It’s not uncommon to see grease and other contaminants on the brake linings. As brake linings wear and/or are contaminated the braking force will diminish.

**Brake Drums**: Inspect the brake drums for wear and scoring or grooves that may affect the operation of the brakes and damage new brake linings.

**Springs & Hardware**: Inspect the return springs and hardware for proper mounting and operation.

**Brake Magnets**: Inspect the magnets for wear. If excessive wear is evident (i.e., windings can be seen through the surface) the magnet needs to be replaced. Inspect the wiring for chaffing or wear and repair as required.

**Brake Adjustments**: As the brake linings begin to wear the brake actuating lever must travel further to apply the same braking force against the drums. Eventually the brake linings cannot effectively reach the drums and manually adjusted brakes need to be adjusted. This requires a brake adjusting tool and proper clearances from the manufacturer. It’s probably best left to the professionals.

**Wheel Bearings, Races & Seals**: Another common problem with trailers is lack of wheel bearing maintenance. Bearings need to be inspected for any damage and proper lubrication, and seals and bearing races need to be inspected for damage.

**Battery Maintenance**: Don’t forget to include routine battery maintenance too. The trailer break-away switch will not operate if the auxiliary battery is not connected or properly charged.

All too often a trailer sits for periods of time not being used. Many times this non-use is for extended periods of time. When it’s time to use the trailer we tend to hook it up and drive off without really considering what may have gone wrong while it sat in storage. It’s common for a battery to discharge, for tires to be dangerously low on air, and the trailer plug contacts to get dirty and corroded. If the trailer brakes don’t work properly because of a bad contact in the plug, or a tire fails because of under inflation it puts us and others in harm’s way.

To help prevent these kinds of things from happening I am including a simple pre-trip trailer checklist you can follow to make sure your trailer is ready to hit the road. After properly hitching the trailer (i.e. WDH adjustments, sway control, safety chains) to the vehicle make the following checks:
✓ Inspect the trailer plug and vehicle receptacle contacts for dirt, debris and corrosion. Clean the plug and contacts as required to ensure a proper connection. Plug the light cord in and test all of the trailer lights.

✓ Connect the trailer break-away lanyard to a secure connection on the tow vehicle.

✓ After properly hitching the trailer test the operation of the trailer brakes. Remove any wheel chocks. Pull the trailer forward slightly and depress the brake pedal to verify the trailer brakes are engaging. Test the brake controller manual override for proper operation too.

✓ Check all tires for abnormal wear and any weather cracking or checking. If any cracks in the tire sidewalls are deeper than 1/32” have the tire inspected by a professional before towing the trailer.

✓ Check and adjust tire pressure in accordance with the federal certification label on the trailer and based on actual loads using the tire manufacturer load and inflation tables.

✓ Check the condition of the battery. For lead acid batteries check the water level in each cell and add distilled water as required.

✓ Check the battery state of charge using a multimeter or battery hydrometer. If you don’t feel comfortable working on or around lead acid battery’s have battery maintenance performed by an authorized service center.

✓ Every 5,000 miles or annually schedule a trailer brake and wheel bearing inspection.
Winter RV Battery Storage Quiz

Are you RV educated? Take this short quiz to see if your RV batteries are prepared for cold weather storage.

Hint: Read this article for clues to the quiz answers:

Two of the most common causes for RV battery failure are undercharging and overcharging. Undercharging is a result of batteries being repeatedly discharged and not fully recharged between cycles. If a battery is not recharged the sulfate material that attaches to the discharged portions of the plates begins to harden into crystals. Eventually this sulfate cannot be converted back into active plate material and the battery is ruined. This also occurs when a battery remains discharged for an extended period of time, like during storage. Sulfation is the number one cause of battery failure. The second leading cause of battery failure is overcharging. Overcharging batteries results in severe water loss and plate corrosion.

With that said let's look at some tips on how to properly store your RV batteries:

Before we talk about storing the batteries we need to talk about battery safety. Lead acid batteries contain sulfuric acid which is extremely corrosive and can cause severe burns or even blindness. And the hydrogen gas that batteries produce when they are charging is very explosive. When you work around batteries you need to wear goggles and gloves, remove all jewelry and do not smoke or use any open flames.

Caution: If you accidentally get battery acid on your skin, flush it with lots of water and if it gets in your eyes flush with low pressure water for 15 minutes and call a doctor.

When you put the RV in long term storage it's a good idea to remove the batteries and put them in storage too. This is quite simple to do. The first thing we want to do is visually inspect the batteries for any obvious damage. Any fluid on or around the battery may be an indication that electrolyte is leaking from the battery. A damaged or leaking battery should be replaced immediately. Whenever you remove any battery always remember to remove the negative terminal or cable first, and then the positive cable.

Battery Tip: When you remove a battery turn off the ignition switch, all electrical switches, and any battery disconnect switches before you disconnect the battery cables. Whenever you remove battery cables label them first so you remember how they go back on the battery.
When you reinstall the battery do it in the reverse order. Install the positive cable first and then the negative cable.

Clean the batteries with a 50/50 mixture of baking soda and water if necessary. Now you can check the electrolyte level in each cell and add distilled water if necessary. The minimum level required is at the top of the plates. If it's below the plates add enough distilled water to cover the plates before you charge the battery.

Test the battery state of charge using a voltmeter or hydrometer and charge any batteries that are at or below 80%. An 80% charge is approximately 12.5 volts for a 12 volt battery and 6.25 volts for a 6 volt battery. Lead sulfation starts when a battery state of charge drops below 80%. After charging the batteries check and fill each cell to 1/8 inch below the fill well with distilled water. Overfilling cells will cause battery acid to overflow.

**Caution:** Batteries should only be charged in a well ventilated area and keep any sparks and open flames away from a battery being charged. Check the electrolyte levels before and after charging batteries.

A discharged or partially charged battery will freeze much faster than a charged battery. Store the batteries in a cool dry place but not where they could freeze. Batteries in storage will loose a percentage of current through internal leakage. It's not uncommon for a battery to discharge up to 10% a month when it is being stored. Cold temperatures slow this natural discharge process down and warmer temperatures speed the process up. Test the stored battery state of charge every month and charge batteries that are at or below an 80% state of charge.

Completely charge the batteries before re-installing them next spring. For optimum performance you can equalize the batteries after they are fully charged. An equalizing charge is an increase in charging voltage similar to a bulk charge to convert any crystallized lead sulfate back into its original components.

If you decide to leave the batteries in the RV while it is in storage remember to check the state of charge monthly and charge any batteries at or below an 80% charge. Some RV converter multi-stage chargers and aftermarket chargers are designed to maintain a float charge on the battery without removing the batteries from the RV. But remember, for the converter charger to work the RV will need to be plugged in to electricity.

**Watch this video** to get some helpful information and tips on storing and maintaining your RV deep cycle batteries during the cold winter months.

~RV101
Lots of folks head south in their RVs for warmer climates during the cold winter months. They are referred to as snow birds, spending several months at a time at their favorite destination. Normally when you plan a trip in your RV you conduct some type of pre-trip checks to make sure the RV is properly prepared for travel. When it’s time to leave the campground you perform these checks again for the return trip. But what happens when you find that perfect campground or RV park and stay put for extended periods of time? Do you conduct routine maintenance checks on the RV to make sure it is in a safe and operable condition while it’s parked? Most likely you do, but if not here are some extended-stay maintenance checks to help keep your rig in tip-top shape.

• Inflate the tires to the manufacturer’s recommended pressure. Tires can lose as much as 2 to 3 psi a month. If you stay in one spot for 3-6 months the tire pressure could be dangerously low. If the unit is not being moved check and adjust the tire pressure on a monthly basis. Ozone in the air and UV rays from the sun shorten the life of your RV tires. This is especially true of the tires sidewall. You should inspect your tires periodically for any checking or cracks in the tire sidewalls. If you notice any damage, have the tires inspected by a professional before using the RV. Keep the tires covered to block out the sunlight when the RV is sitting in one spot or not in use.

• Place some type of RV blocking between the ground and the tires. Make sure that whatever you use is larger than the footprint of the tire. No portion of the tire should hang over the edge of the tire block. This can cause internal damage to the tire. Storage surface areas can cause your tires to age prematurely. You don’t want to leave the tires in contact with any heat producing material or petroleum based material like asphalt for long periods of time. The blocking acts as a barrier between the tires and the ground surface they are stored on.

• If it is a motorized RV you should fill the fuel tank prior to parking it for long periods of time and add a fuel stabilizer. Run the engine and the generator long enough for the fuel stabilizer to get through the fuel system. If you are not using the
generator while the RV is parked you should exercise it monthly, for at least 2-hours with a minimum of a ½ rated load on the generator. Consult your generator set owner’s manual for rated loads.

• Check and fill the water levels in all lead acid batteries and make sure the batteries stay fully charged. The electrolyte levels in batteries can be depleted through long term use. Check the water levels once or twice weekly depending on usage. You can use a digital voltmeter to measure voltage and get a quick picture of the batteries depth of discharge. A fully charged battery should read about 12.7 volts. Battery readings less than 12.5 volts indicate the battery needs re-charging.

• Change the oil and oil filter on the engine and the generator prior to long-stays or long-term storage. Acids accumulate in used oil and can corrode engine bearings over time.

• Routinely test the operation of all safety devices. This includes the carbon monoxide detector, LP gas leak detector and smoke alarm. Check the fire extinguisher monthly to make sure it is fully charged.

• Before moving the RV, after extended-stays or periods of storage, check all fluid levels in the transmission, power steering, engine coolant, engine oil, windshield washer and brakes. Consult your vehicle owner’s manual for proper levels. Start the engine and check for proper readings on all gauges. Check the condition of windshield wiper blades and replace them if necessary. Check the operation of all lights. Make sure the vehicle emissions / inspection sticker is up to date.

~RV 101
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RV Education 101 Learning RVs the Easy Way
Our goal with RV Consumer E-Magazine is to provide you with helpful information to make all of your RV experiences more enjoyable. I left my position as an RV Sales and F&I manager in 2000 to devote my full attention to RV Education 101.

We produce RV educational videos and publish books and e-books on how to safely & properly use and maintain your RV. The reason I left my job was because of my concern about the lack of educational and safety awareness material available to the RV consumer, in other words you.

My wife Dawn left her position in RV sales to help start the company, and is our Sales and Marketing Director. We currently have a 35-foot Class A motor home and travel with our two dogs, Roxie and Gracie.

If you would like to learn more about us and about RV Education 101 please visit www.rveducation101.com

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