



Truck Campers Rated

Slide-in Camper Ratings by Brand



JD Gallant

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Ratings for Slide-in Truck Campers By Brand

by

JD GALLANT



Quilcene, WA 98376

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About JD Gallant:

Author of several RV consumer books and co-founder of RV Consumer Group, JD Gallant has played a positive and major role in bringing about safety changes in the RV industry. A former teacher and business owner, JD retired early in life and began his adventures traveling the country with his wife Connie in a converted school bus they designed themselves.

JD began his research into RV safety in the early 1990s by putting himself through the paces of working in an RV dealership to learn all about the methods being used to sell RVs. He soon developed a learning course for RVers titled *The Language of RVing* and began recruiting volunteers to help the organization gather information ranging from RV floor plans to accidents.

As RV Consumer Group gathered momentum, the staff and volunteers began visiting manufacturing factories to document workmanship and construction materials used. JD designed the database still used to this day to input all the specifications of a particular brand and put it through an analysis that includes staff reviews and owner satisfaction polls. The result of such analysis yielded the RV Ratings Guides, both in hard copy publications and most currently in downloadable format.

As author and designer of such publications, JD feels very proud that his efforts, and those of the entire staff of RV Consumer Group and volunteers, have contributed to saving many lives over the years.

RV Consumer Group would not exist today if it had not been for JD's visions, dedication to safety, and determination to educate consumers.

Introduction

Slide-in truck campers have proven to be an essential ingredient of modern living on the fringes of urban life. I remember that whenever RV sales people held their pep rallies I would hear things like, “If they’ve got a truck, they’re ready for a fifth wheel or a truck camper.”

How true it was. Anyone who drove around with an empty truck bed could be carrying around a vacation home just as easily. A few thousand bucks and you could have a cute little home behind you. A home that you could live in all summer or go south and stay in all winter. And since you already have the truck, just slide in the house and you have your secondary home wherever and whenever you go.

Sound dreamy? Yeah, it is dreamy—and maybe a bit more than that. It’s also practical for the right people and impractical for those who jump in without a sharply defined purpose.

“Whoa there,” you say. “What’s this about ‘for the right people’ and that word ‘practical?’ Sounds like limitations to me.”

You better believe it! There are limitations to using a slide-in truck camper just as there are limitations to using any tool or vehicle. Maybe more so than some. A truck camper sits on the back of a truck with much of its weight above the top of the truck’s cab. (Excepting, of course, those wonderful fold-downs or crank-downs.) The stability of the unit as a whole depends primarily upon the truck’s suspension. If the suspension isn’t adequate, the rig can be dangerous. When you turn a corner, it’ll begin to heel like a sailboat in a hurricane. Of course, braking is also important in case you need to stop in a hurry. Then there’s the problem of power. If you don’t have enough power, you might be considered a hazard because others using the road may get frustrated following you. All this is just to remind you to that a slide-in should match a truck in ways other than color.

Accidents happen. Some are truly accidents and others are caused by negligence. Most could have been avoided by being sure the truck can safely 'handle' the weight. You'll find soon enough that getting recommendations from your truck manufacturer for carrying a slide-in camper might be almost impossible. (Maybe Ford's an exception.). And don't go by the 1/2, 3/4, or 1-ton ratings because that rarely works.

Regardless of what the manufacturer says, keep in mind that they'll be giving you 'carrying' capacity, not 'handling' capacity. They will, in effect, be telling you that you can carry a total weight without exceeding the chassis capacity or gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR). They may also tell you not to exceed the gross combined weight rating (GCWR). If you are pulling a boat or a horse trailer, for example, GCWR is important. None of this can be ignored or trusted to a salesperson. You must stay in the driver's seat. If you exceed these government regulated limits, you may be held responsible if there's an accident.



The design of the slide-in is extremely important. The center of gravity and the location of storage compartments are critical. When turning a ‘normal’ corner and the unit ‘heels’ more than 5 degrees—which isn’t much—you should be asking yourself, “What can I do to correct it?” If passing trucks or sidewinds cause an uncomfortable ‘sway,’ you should be asking yourself, “What can I do to correct it?” Then, if it can’t be corrected, you should be considering the risk of continued use.

So, slide-in truck campers are important vehicles for people who have a reason for owning one. They are a great tool for fun or work. They will go easily where other recreational vehicles go with difficulty. But, when considering the floorplan and size of a truck camper, remember that more bad choices are made with slide-ins than any other recreational vehicle because—like a backpack on a hiker—they must fit the truck perfectly. So, to be sure that you are one of those who makes a good choice, stay in the driver’s seat and demand accurate facts about your potential purchase.

It’s all about choices!



It's all about choices!





...And more choices!



**Camper Manufacturers in the Twenty-First Century
(in alphabetical order)**

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**HISTORIES,
CONSTRUCTION,
AND
REVIEWS
OF
TRUCK CAMPER
MANUFACTURERS**

(In Alphabetical Order)

Adventurer (ALP)

HISTORY:

Adventurer Manufacturing — not to be confused with the towable manufacturer, Adventure Manufacturing of Peru, Indiana — has been building RVs since 1969. Founded by Erdman Epp and his wife Mabel in Abbotsford, British Columbia as Fraserway Camper Manufacturing Ltd., the company specialized in truck campers bearing the brand name Slumber Queen.

In 1988, Erdman Epp decided to turn Fraserway into a strictly retail arm of the business. While continuing to build truck campers, the company gradually branched out into class C motorhomes and fifth wheels. The Slumber Queen brand name eventually became associated with rental units and the campers produced for dealerships in the US and Canada were renamed Adventurer.

Then, with its expansion from regional to international operations in 2004, the company name was changed again to Adventurer Manufacturing Ltd. All its products now carry the brand name Adventurer.

In 2008, Adventurer pulled up roots and moved to Yakima, Washington, filling the gap left by Trail Wagons and Western RV.

CONSTRUCTION:

One piece aluminum roof. Walls are wood framed with fiberglass batten insulation, wrapped with Reflectix foil and covered with .025 aluminum. Floors appear to be plywood with a rubberized undercoating.

REVIEW BY RVCg STAFF:

We looked at Adventurer's products, including truck campers at a recent Seattle show and were only mildly impressed. We found them slightly better than average with most negatives coming from workmanship. The materials looked good, but time is the test here. There was nothing outstanding in design. But then, I don't look for much from the normally entry-level truck camper manufacturers.

From JD: According to my notes and photos, I saw some things that turned me off; but not enough to keep me from looking at their full line of truck campers. All in all, I'm compelled to give the Adventurer slide-ins a better-than-average score of 78. I think that with a little more quality control they might easily take a big jump for more stars in the next few years.

STAR RATING:

Alaskan Campers

HISTORY:

Alaskan Camper was founded by R.D. Hall in Sunland, California in 1958. He actually started building pop-up truck campers in 1953, but, as demand grew, he realized that he had a thriving business at his fingertips. By 1963, the company had five factories, and in 1965, two more opened in Canada. The camper's design, unique at the time, allowed it to be raised and lowered by means of hydraulic jacks.

After Hall's retirement in 1982, operations were consolidated in the North Bend, Washington facility. Hall passed away in 1990, having been a force in the RV industry for the development of the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA). Donald Wheat, an RV industry veteran, took over as President and CEO. In 1991, Alaskan's production moved to Chehalis, Washington, where it remains.

CONSTRUCTION:

The roof is laminated using spray foam insulation. Walls are similar, with an aluminum skin. (Although we suspect that the framing is wood.) Floors are covered with Congoleum. Although we've seen a few Alaskans, most details given to the public are vague at best. Maybe Alaskan wants to keep its construction top secret.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

Alaskan's slide-in campers share something in common with the telescoping trailers made by TrailManor: They are pop-ups that are raised and lowered by means of a hydraulic system. Because they are hard-sided rather than canvas-sided like many other pop-ups, they have a more aerodynamic, less boxy, appearance when traveling down the road.

Interiors are rather plain. However, clients are invited to customize their purchases to suit their taste. Although we have few customer comments on this brand, the impression is that the company has a loyal client base — probably a good thing because they don't appear to have an extensive dealer network.

From JD: Alaskans are likely to be good for one or two people who don't need much room. Expect to pay more than what you would for an entry level slide-in because of the telescoping design and the lightweight, low-profile advantage. Although some on the RVCG staff think the Alaskan is more “green” and probably safer because of the low profile, I think that they need better public relations — especially improving their website information — before I can start to praise them for anything. Because of this reluctance to publish more technical information, I can't give them over a 75.

STAR RATING:



Allen Camper Mfg

HISTORY:

E.C. Peay started Allen Camper Manufacturing in 1958, building truck campers and pickup caps in the small town of Allen, Oklahoma. When the company celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2008, it was still a family-owned business, now run by Peay's sons.

In 1981, around the time that the elder Peay retired, Allen Camper expanded its product offerings to include trailers and fifth wheels. Although demand had slowed for truck campers, the company continued to build them, along with their entry-level to mid-priced Idle-Time and Outpost Lite towables. More recently, they branched into Sports Utility Vehicles.

Allen often customizes their products, a luxury the big production-line companies usually cannot supply. Although they acknowledge some disadvantage to working so far from the heartland of the RV industry in Indiana, by staying put and staying small, they've cultivated a regional market and managed to stay afloat during tough times for the industry. Allen stopped building slide-in in 2007.

CONSTRUCTION:

Standard models used basic "stick and tin" construction in walls and roof, although their 2-inch walls were thicker than those on most campers and allowed for R-7 fiberglass insulation.

REVIEW BY RVCg STAFF:

Considering how long Allen Camper has been in business, they must be doing something right! But, for some reason, they stopped manufacturing truck campers after model year 2007. Although we have no comments on polls that we've collected,

the buyers seem to think that the slide-in truck campers were “okay”. Not excellent, but somewhere above average.

From JD: If they built their truck campers with the same care as they did the towables, I think you might find a used one that gives good service if it hasn’t been beaten too hard. Just keep in mind that Allen products aren’t heavy duty. Still, they are, in my opinion, a good product and easily earn a rating of 75.

STAR RATING: 



Bigfoot

HISTORY:

Bigfoot Industries of Armstrong, British Columbia, Canada, was founded by Terry Mayall in 1976. He later sold the company and started another RV manufacturing firm called Leisure Coach Works, only to repurchase Bigfoot in the 1990's. Mayall was tragically killed in a plane crash in 1998, leaving his wife Sharon to take over the helm. Bigfoot's goal was to manufacture a hand-built, leakproof, and dust-free RV. They began by making their own fiberglass molds as well as other components used in their RVs, such as fiberglass shower stalls and tubs and in-house-built slideouts. Later, they expanded their trailer lines and added class C motorhomes and truck campers to their product offerings.

Just before Thanksgiving 2008, we received news that Bigfoot ceased production and closed its doors for good — another casualty of the general business downturn. Then early in 2010, Bigfoot was back in business under new ownership building trailers and truck campers. They are still building slide-ins as of 2018.

CONSTRUCTION:

The 1500 and 2500 models have a two-piece molded fiberglass shell. The 3000 models used the more conventional Fibercore construction consisting of an interior panel, aluminum framing with a core of rigid foam, injected polyurethane foam insulation, covered with lauan backed fiberglass. The roofs on earlier models were covered with EPDM rubber.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

Although we've always liked what we saw when we inspected Bigfoot campers at shows, customers have not always been completely satisfied. Here's what some of them thought about

previous years' models:

"We looked at many different brands as we could possibly find in our 8-month search for the perfect slide-in. Bigfoot is top-of-the-line. They don't get any better after all aspects are considered."

"Unique fiberglass clamshell construction. Leakproof, durable. Quality materials. Upscale product with premium pricing."

"Even though the Bigfoot is an excellent camper, there were small problems here and there. I had a leaky window, the furnace thermostat had to be replaced, the door for the outside shower would not stay closed and the gray water dump valve leaked but was caught before I took ownership. Bigfoot is a great camper, but they could use a bit of improvement in quality control. Also, my last pet peeve, only rustproof screws should be used on the exterior. I replaced several that began to rust."

"I was naive when I bought this model. I might have done better with more research."

"Some of the screws used to hold items in place were installed into nothing. I have since replaced them. Heater broke within the first



I liked this Bigfoot slide-in truck camper that was displayed at an RV show.

year. I had to deal with the heater manufacturer to get it fixed. Bigfoot does not cover appliance failure. Overall, though, this camper is outstanding in quality and workmanship, and has provided my family with some memorable moments."

"Camper developed a structural problem with the floor. It started to bend and droop off the back of the truck. Bigfoot at first denied any problems with this and said that it was probably the truck. The Bigfoot dealer we met on a trip indicated they had sent back several of our year and model to the factory for repair. We called Bigfoot again and they agreed to look at it if we delivered it to the factory in British Columbia. They said it would be fixed in 3 weeks. It was 5 months before we got it back. It had weathered badly sitting on their lot, so needs a paint job. They fixed the floor—sort of. It was flat when we picked it up but has since developed a slight bow like it is starting to droop again. Next time I buy a camper it will be a Lance."

Such mixed reviews should inspire caution and a thorough inspection when considering a used Bigfoot camper, and even more so if you'll be looking at new models built under the new ownership.

From JD: I find the above consumer comments just a bit hard on the Bigfoot slide-in. I think part of the problem is that Bigfoot salespeople push them as the "perfect" camper when there's no such thing as a "perfect" RV. You tell a buyer this and when they get the slightest problem, they're disappointed. The Bigfoot is heavy, expensive, and very good. I've seen many slide-ins and have talked to many owners over many years. Bigfoot deserves an 80—and that's what I'm giving it.

Star Rating:



Coachmen

HISTORY:

Coachmen Industries was founded by the Corson brothers in 1964 in Elkhart, Indiana. They started out building trailers and truck campers, and later diversified into motorhomes, boats, manufactured housing, and building materials. Over the years, they acquired other major RV builders, such as Shasta, Sportscoach, Georgie Boy, and Viking RV, all of whose brands are still produced under their original company names. After a slump during the gas crisis of the late 1970's, Coachmen rose to the status of a Fortune 500 company in 1984 and continued to diversify and establish plants for its various products throughout the US. But by the mid-1980's, sales were down again, then fluctuated wildly during the next 20 years.

Coachmen's history, like the waves of the sea, has been a series of ups and downs, openings and closings of factories, acquisitions of assets and sales of assets. Unable to recover from its frequent reversals of fortune, Coachmen RV was purchased by Berkshire-Hathaway (Forest River) in late 2008.

CONSTRUCTION:

The Sport was built "stick and tin" style, using a one-piece aluminum roof and an oriented strand board (OSB) floor. The Ranger was an upgrade and used laminated walls with fiberglass siding. The roof was also laminated with a rubber covering. The floor, however, was OSB like the Sport.

REVIEW BY RVCg STAFF:

We've always said a Coachmen is a Coachmen, is a Coachmen — and that seems to be borne out by the comments below. Although one of the comments is favorable, our experience and that of many consumers is that their workmanship and materials are below average.

Coachmen discontinued their truck camper line after the 2001 model year. If you come across a used one with a tempting price, be very careful. In fact, we encourage you to look at other brands in the same price range first. Here's what consumers thought:



We have seen far too many deficiencies in Coachmen Truck Campers. The arrow points to a serious trim defect and hole in the corner. (Maybe a drain hole for leaking roofs?)

"We love this thing! Sometimes we sleep in it parked in our backyard."

"I will never purchase anything that has Coachmen's name on it again."

"After spending time in the camper, we noticed workmanship issues that seemed unacceptable to us. Cupboard doors improperly installed, door handles not in alignment, etc. To this day there is something that rattles in the ceiling when on the road — which I picture is a bolt, tool, or marble-shaped object. We have had it in once to have some of these things fixed but not to our entire satisfaction. The workers were great but.... I really wanted to bring this to Coachmen and have them look at it to see the work that was being done in their plants."

"Love our popup, but it has two flaws: 1) The front bed is heavy and does not slide out nearly as easily as other manufacturers', 2) The water heater is not the greatest and does not have an electric start. You must light the pilot light, which does not stay lit very easily."

From JD: What can I say! The few truck campers that Coachmen built were junk when they came off the line. If you buy one, expect the worst—because there's a 95% chance of major problems within two years. I give the Coachmen slide-ins a numerical rating of 40.

STAR RATING:

NO Stars!

Columbia Northwest

HISTORY:

When Ralph Tait decided to build prototypes of his folding trailer design, the Aliner, it was just a hobby, carried out in his garage in Bend, Oregon. Initially he built the trailers one at a time; but in 1984, at the instigation of his two sons, the family founded Columbia Northwest. Soon afterward, they moved the company back to Tait's home state of Pennsylvania.

Business boomed throughout the 1980's and '90's. The hard-sided Aliner fold-downs sold well, and eventually, a line of small, lightweight conventional trailers was added.

In 2007, the Tait family sold Columbia Northwest to an equity group, Pennsylvania Growth Fund LLC, headed by Ned Collins. The Aliner was to remain the heart of the business as it had for thirty years, aimed primarily at RVers who wanted to step down from larger trailers to something lighter and more fuel-efficient to tow, but that offered greater privacy and solidity than a tent trailer. The Aliner products are sold throughout the US and Canada and as far afield as Iceland.

CONSTRUCTION:

We haven't seen a Truck Cabin in our neck of the woods and didn't make it to the factory during the few years they were being built. Since they didn't go into details in their brochures either, you're on your own with this one.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

Although we have a number of rating polls on the Aliner campers, we have only 4 comments:

‘One of few hard sided pop-ups on market. Engineering and design very good. Interior finish and construction could be better.’

‘I like the concept of the Aliner and I like my camper, but I

will never buy another one unless the company changes its attitude and work ethic. Workmanship on my unit is very poor”.

"It's lightweight and easy to work with. "

Well, it is lightweight and made with lightweight materials. But we've found the workmanship is usually good.

From JD: Although Aliner built truck campers through 2006 as Truck Cabin Freedom, we haven't been able to inspect one. However, if you find a used one, it'll probably be okay. But because it is lightweight and made with mostly wood, go over it with a fine-tooth comb. As far as ratings, I can't give it above a 76—and that's based on Aliner towables.

STAR RATING:



Cruiser RV

HISTORY:

Cruiser RV was created from the ruins of the Shadow Cruiser company that went bankrupt in 1999. Sunnybrook RV purchased their assets and retained the Shadow Cruiser brand name. Then, in the spring of 1999, Pat Makusky, Sr. and Louis Dickerhoof purchased the name, assets, and a factory lease from Sunnybrook in Bristol, Indiana and started Cruiser RV. At first, they offered only the original Shadow Cruiser fifth wheel and the Shadow Cruiser truck campers. The truck campers were soon dropped.

In 2002, they introduced the ultralite, entry-level Fun Finder based on floorplans for the old Shadow Cruiser Silhouette. Dave Fought, formerly of Sunnybrook and owner of Doubletree RV, provided Cruiser's owners with additional working capital and made Cruiser RV a subsidiary of Doubletree in 2003. The following year saw Fought's purchase of Cruiser and a move to larger production space in Howe, Indiana. In 2006, they added the Fun Finder Xtra toyhauler. No slide-ins after 2004.

CONSTRUCTION:

The walls are wood framed with aluminum bracing at stress points. Fiberglass batten insulation is placed between the studs, and an extra thin layer of foam is sandwiched under the aluminum skin. The hardside's roof consists of two sheets of lauan with styrofoam between, then covered with rubber. The pop-up's roof is block foam with a fiberglass shell. The floor is plywood.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

The Shadow Cruiser truck campers had a great reputation at one time, but quality had already apparently slipped when the company was purchased by Sunnybrook in 1999. When Cruiser RV started later in 1999, the Shadow Cruiser campers were sold



This Shadow Cruiser looks good inside and outside.

under their name rather than Sunnybrook's. The campers were discontinued after the 2004 model year, perhaps, at least in part, because of lack of demand. That was about the same time that quite a few major manufacturers dropped slide-ins in favor of developing larger, heavier motorhomes and added more and larger slideouts to all their RVs.

We have very few comments on the Shadow Cruiser truck campers that were manufactured after 2000, and those that we have show a relatively high level of satisfaction.

Shadow Cruisers were mostly entry-level to mid-priced campers. If you find a used one, it's likely to be nothing fancy — and you'll have to check thoroughly for leaks. If you're not too picky and everything checks out, it might actually be a bargain. Here are a couple of typical comments:

"Great customer service from factory when we have phoned them with questions."

"Good quality and features at a reasonable price."

From JD: Long, long ago, I was at a Shadow Cruiser plant that was run by people who thought they could revive the defunct brand. The brand has been on a long roller-coaster ride in both

profitability and quality. I've seen it all, but I still didn't want it dead. Still, it is dead. And, for that reason, it's a 76 and won't get any better.

STAR RATING:



This Shadow Cruiser slide-in shows how Cruiser RV is innovative.

Eagle Cap Campers

HISTORY:

Eagle Cap Campers, Inc. of La Grande, Oregon first opened for business as Intermountain RV in 2003. In 2005, the company was purchased by a Canadian manufacturer, West Coast Leisure Homes (Okanagan). The new team redesigned not just the vacuum-bonded, aluminum-framed campers, but the whole building process to emphasize speedy and efficient assembly-line production as a priority.

In 2008, a decision was made to build some models with wood rather than aluminum framing for the purpose of cutting down costs as well as making the campers lighter. Their philosophy is that vacuum-bonded construction determines the solidity and strength of the final product — and not the framing material. Although this is a controversial subject among RV manufacturers, we tend to agree.

The parent company, Okanagan, bit the dust in 2008. After some uncertainty with Eagle Cap, Adventurer LP, of Yakima Washington, acquired all assets of Eagle Cap in 2010.

CONSTRUCTION:

The roof consists of aluminum trusses with block foam insulation, topped with TPO vinyl. Walls are framed with aluminum, with block foam insulation and a fiberglass skin. The floor is also aluminum framed and covered with OSB (outer board strand).

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

The Eagle Cap slide-in campers have a reputation for being well built and well-equipped, although they are on the heavy and pricey side. The following comments are typical of what we hear from owners:

"The major design flaw is the weight of the unit, but I was aware of it before I purchased."

"We had a leak, probably due to outside reasons, and the factory rep came to our house and fixed it because the factory is far away and he was in town! They have been wonderful with things on the phone, too. Love the camper."

From JD: I've only had a glance at Eagle Cap truck campers and it was hardly enough to qualify myself as an expert on the brand. But from what buyers say, I expect that it's somewhat above average. So, with that said, with my tongue in my cheek and my fingers crossed, I'm giving them a 76 and hope they should really be higher.

STAR RATING:



Fleetwood

(Caribou, Elkhorn)

HISTORY:

John Crean planted the seed that grew into Fleetwood in Compton, California back in 1950 and 10 years later moved its headquarters to Riverside, California. By 1964, Fleetwood began gobbling companies like Terry Coach Industries, Selgran, and Avion Coach. By the early 1980's Fleetwood had plants on both coasts and subsequently expanded throughout the US, into Canada — diversifying to include every type of RV, from luxury class A's to towables to truck campers. However, by 1995, signs of trouble were already in the wind.

After a dispute among the company executives over policy in the manufactured housing division, the corporation bought most of John Crean's stock in 1998, and he retired. John Crean died in January, 2007 at the age of 81.

With most of its cash gone (blamed primarily on Crean's cashing out), Fleetwood tottered under new management. Things got worse after 2000 when escalating fuel prices and steadily falling consumer confidence took its toll. In 2009, Fleetwood filed chapter 11 bankruptcy and was subsequently purchased in July of 2009 by American Industrial Partners Capital Fund, which purchased some of the plants and intellectual property of Fleetwood's motorhome interests. The trailer division was entirely eliminated. Fleetwood is no longer just "Fleetwood", but is now Fleetwood RV under its new ownership and builds only motor homes, retaining some of the original brand names, such as the Bounder, Tioga, and Jamboree. No slide-ins after 2004.

CONSTRUCTION:

Fleetwood used two construction techniques. The Angler and Elkhorn LE slide-in campers were "stick and tin" but with a rubber

roof and laminated floor. The Caribou and Elkhorn used aluminum rafters laminated with block foam between lauan and outer strand board (OSB) underlayment, topped with rubber. The walls were aluminum framed, with block foam laminated inside lauan and OSB, and topped with rubber. Floors were wood framed, foam insulated, and covered with plywood.

REVIEW FROM RVCG STAFF:

Fleetwood built just about every type of RV on the planet (except telescoping trailers), and that included slide-in truck campers. Its entry-level Angler, mid-priced Elkhorn, and top-of-the-line Caribou brands were popular with RVers from the mid-1990's through 2004, when Fleetwood dropped them entirely.

Quality control, as was the case with many other Fleetwood products, was a frequent problem with these RVs. Leaks were another common complaint. Here are some comments we've received from consumers:



You'll find used Elkhorns and Caribous almost everywhere. But inspection skills will be required to get one that won't nickel and dime you to death.

Angler - "Good value in a relatively inexpensive camper; not many frills; just enough."

Elkhorn - "At this point, structurally, the camper is worn out. Has had leaks, which were repaired. It was well maintained and used a lot, but I have had 20-year-old campers that were still structurally sound. I am disappointed, as I had planned on using this camper another 10 years."

Caribou - "Quality problems, too heavy, poor design."

Caribou - "Unit has served us well with no problems after first window leak and refrigerator problems — which were taken care of under warranty."

Caribou - "We were told this camper had been damaged at some point going to an RV show. That's why we were getting it for \$10,000 less than manufacturer's retail. We were also told that it had been returned to the factory and repaired to factory specs. The roof only lasted three years on a twelve-year warranty. Then we had some problems with the camper collapsing. After having it taken apart, we found that the damage was never repaired properly. Our water heater is not working, the electric jacks on one side went out, and I could go on, but I think you get the idea."



A drawer, as shown in this Fleetwood Caribou, shows us one part of the truck camper that had above average quality in materials and workmanship.



This shows a defect in an Elkhorn that should have never left the Fleetwood plant.



This Elkhorn looks good unless you look too closely. Sometimes the defects are subtle, but they are there. Fleetwood was good at making a product that looked good. But, as with all products of this nature, the proof is in its ability to hold up under the stresses of use.

Because of Fleetwood's high profile in the RV industry, these campers were widely available in the US. We still see them, despite their age, in our neck of the woods. Nevertheless, we strongly advise caution when considering a purchase of a used model of any of Fleetwood's truck campers, even though you're likely to get it cheap. We always urge paying a little more for quality and durability.

From JD: I've seen many Fleetwood truck campers throughout the years. Sometimes I was impressed and sometimes not. However, the buyers don't think much of them. I'm not sure if it's because of real problems with the unit or problems with service, but the scores are dismal. In trying to be fair because we have under 100 polls for Fleetwood slide-ins, I'm going to split the difference between what I think it should be and what the buyers are saying with a 67.

STAR RATING:



Forest River

HISTORY:

Forest River is another of those huge conglomerates that manufactures everything from high-line diesel coaches to folding campers, truck campers (formerly), manufactured homes, cargo trailers, and even boats.

Pete Liegl, formerly of Cobra Industries, founded Forest River in Elkhart, Indiana in 1996 with his purchase of assets from bankrupt Cobra Industries from which he was "fired" in 1994. Rapid diversification followed, with independently-managed divisions springing up all over the US.

Forest River's strength has always been in towables and remains so. Although the company maintains a stable of motorhomes that ranges from top-of-the-line diesels to entry-level class C's, real success in the motorized sector has eluded them. In 2005, Forest River was purchased by Warren Buffet's gigantic Berkshire-Hathaway corporation, with Pete Liegl remaining at the helm. In 2008, Liegl formed a buyout deal with Coachmen RV (with Buffet's approval, of course). What goes around comes around: Liegl got his start at Coachmen.

CONSTRUCTION:

Forest River campers used entirely laminated construction. The roofs were aluminum framed, with expanded polystyrene (aka Styrofoam) covered with fiberglass. Walls are also aluminum framed with polystyrene and a fiberglass skin. Some were gel-coated. The floors were framed with steel, insulated with polystyrene and covered with outer strand board (OSB).



Apparently, I didn't like the crooked and loose latch on the cabinet nor the gobs of sealant on the roof of this Forest River Real-Lite truck camper.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

Forest River purchased Veri-Lite Campers in 2000. Prior to that, the Veri-Lite line was split into two in 1997 with the Real-Lite series becoming the longer, more expensive models. From 2000-2001, under Forest River, all the models were marketed under the Real-Lite brand name. Apparently, the venture into truck campers was not a success for Forest River, since they discontinued the line after 2001.

We have no consumer feedback on this brand, nor have we seen any examples ourselves. Our advice, should you come across one of these dinosaurs, is that you should probably run the other way. It may not eat you, but it could eat your wallet.

From JD: I can understand why our members aren't buying Forest River's truck camper. From everything I've seen at shows, they were really poorly built through and through. Without saying more, I'm giving these campers a 50, which is probably too much.

STAR RATING:



Four Wheel Campers

HISTORY:

Four Wheel Campers, maker of pop-up truck campers, has been in business since 1972. Along with its sister company, Six-Pac campers, the company sells its products mostly factory-direct from its headquarters in Woodland, California. In a recent move, operations for the two companies were consolidated at the Woodland plant. Its Riverside, California plant has closed. Four Wheel products are carried by only a few dealerships.

Both companies have their roots in cabinetmaker C.E. Benson's original company, Cabinet Works, begun in 1938. In 1967, they began building the truck campers that evolved into the hard-sided Six-Pac brand. The Four Wheel pop-ups were created by David Rowe, who developed the lift system and basic design and construction methods. After Rowe sold Four Wheel in the 1980's, it went through several more changes of ownership until 2007, when both Four Wheel and Six-Pac were purchased by Tom Hanagan, their present owner. Having weathered the business downturn of 2008-2009, both companies remained in existence. In 2016 the company was sold to a private-equity firm and Six-Pac suspended production. Four Wheel continued in production.

CONSTRUCTION:

Roofs use aluminum frames and skins. Walls are similar, with aluminum skins stapled to the framework. Floors are plywood.

REVIEW FROM RVCG STAFF:

The Four Wheel campers are very lightweight, basic entry-level aluminum-framed pop-ups that are suitable for off-road use. However, most models lack basic amenities often found in other campers, such as bathroom facilities and refrigerator.



The Four Wheel camper people like to tell you that you can take their truck camper anywhere. You should take that sales pitch with a grain of salt.

Nevertheless, Porta-potties, refrigerators, and other amenities can be added as options.

Four Wheel models are a low-budget option for outdoor sportsmen who want a roof over their heads and basic cooking facilities and are not looking for luxury. Their compact size makes them suitable for one, or at most two, occupants. Some owners have complained of a lack of durability, having to replace appliances and even construction components within the first year of use. Some have had problems with the aluminum roof. Workmanship and materials appear to be just acceptable, although customer service is reportedly good.

"They replaced refrigerator, heater, water pump and door at 1 year. All replacements have worked since. Aluminum roof is a problem, This unit is good for four wheeling, but you give up a lot for same."

From JD: This is an entry-level slide-in that has questionable workmanship at times. However, I've seen some that appeared almost perfect. Because I like some of the things the company does, I'm going to give them a 70 and hope that I'm not being too generous.

STAR RATING:



General Coach

HISTORY:

General Coach is a Thor company, acquired in 1982. General Coach Canada, begun in 1950, spent a large part of its life as two independently-run companies — General Coach of Oliver, BC and General Coach of Hensall, Ontario. Both divisions were purchased by Thor Industries in 1982 and continued to operate separately until late 2008, when Thor announced consolidation of the two with headquarters to be located in Hensall.

Both companies formerly manufactured Chateau and Citation towables and motorhomes, while the BC factory also produced the Corsair sister brands and Citation truck campers. This certainly added to the confusion over whose products were whose as distinct from the Chateau and Citation motorhomes manufactured by Thor's Four Winds division and the towables of the same name manufactured by the now defunct Thor America. The consolidation enabled the Hensall plant to focus on its strength — park models — and the Oliver plant on towables. Apparently the camper operation didn't survive the move.

CONSTRUCTION:

General Coach campers underwent a major change around 2000. The roofs of the earlier models were wood framed, with fiberglass batten insulation. The ceiling panels were vinyl coated and the rubber roofs were backed with plywood. Walls were vacuum bonded, with wood framing and high density foam insulation; sheathed with plywood and covered with a Filon fiberglass skin. Floors were plywood.

Later models were completely laminated and aluminum framed, with high density foam throughout.

REVIEW FROM RVCG STAFF:

We don't have many consumer polls on General Coach truck campers, probably because they are not widely available in the US. We do see them frequently in the Pacific Northwest, however, and they appear to be an excellent product. Here's what customers typically thought :

"I have not seen any camper that compares in quality of design, workmanship and materials. After-sales service and warranty backup has been superb!"

"The craftsmanship and quality of this unit was by far superior to any unit built in the United States. We wish that the manufacturers and workers in the US would take more pride in their workmanship."

If you're lucky enough to find one of these at a good price, it could work for you, although these brands tend to be more expensive than comparable brands made in the US. General Coach no longer produces slide-in campers. General Coach's focus has turned to park models, specialty trailers, and manufactured homes.

From JD: I've been to the General Coach plant in Canada and although slide-ins are not their priority, I think they do as well with them as their towables — which are above average. I feel confident that a 77 is pretty much in the ballpark for this brand.

STAR RATING:

Hallmark RV

HISTORY:

With a varied background in RV manufacturing, Hubert Ward's intention was to focus exclusively on the manufacture of hard-sided truck campers. In 1969, with his son Bill, Ward founded Hallmark Campers. Hallmark got an additional boost around that time from Bill's father-in-law, who was on friendly terms with John K. Hanson of Winnebago Industries. Winnebago was just getting out of truck campers, and offered the Ward family business any equipment they wanted to cart away from Iowa to their Fort Lupton, Colorado facility.

Then, during the 1970's gas crisis, noticing the success of slide-in pop-ups, they decided to follow the trend and concentrated on this lighter-weight style. When gas prices dropped again, they returned to building hard-sided models until Lance Camper made the move to Colorado, providing Hallmark with a bit too much competition in that market. They switched back to pop-ups and stayed with that type of construction. Hallmark is still family-owned and operated and not afraid of innovation.

CONSTRUCTION:

Hallmark's construction has continued to evolve over the years, making it difficult to predict the construction of any particular camper. Since about 2008 they have been using composite construction generally only seen in aircraft, yachts, and a few sports cars. Roofs are made of fiberglass reinforced with carbon fiber. Walls use a core of end grain balsa sandwiched between layers of gel-coated fiberglass.

REVIEW:

Owners of Hallmark campers appear to hold them in high regard. The following comment sums up the typical consumer response:

"Hallmark campers are very well built. This camper is good

for winter camping and summer use (-17 degrees so far). I like the real wood interiors and the quality of construction. The camper is built to be used and held for a long time. I have owned two other trailer units that I wore out with use (> 120,000 miles) and I believe this camper will outlast my trailers by twice as long. Been to Alaska twice and this puts a unit to the test."

These lightweight all-weather pop-ups are pricey compared to others of their type, but this probably reflects the use of good-quality materials and attention-to-detail in workmanship. If you find a used one that's been well maintained, it could be a good buy indeed.

From JD: From everything I've seen, Hallmark slide-ins are much better than average. For those of you who want high quality and light weight (often considered an oxymoron), the Hallmark might be your cup of tea. The Hallmark definitely deserves a score of somewhere around 80, so I'm going to give it that.



This Hallmark truck camper shows a problem at the overhang floor. Goes to show that even good ones can have problems with materials and workmanship.



But the rest of it looked very good.

STAR RATING:



Host Industries

HISTORY:

Host Industries of Bend, Oregon was founded by Dave Hogue and Mark Storch, both formerly with Beaver Coach. Hogue's father was the founder of Beaver Coach and ran that company until it was purchased by SMC Corporation in 1994. Dave Hogue stayed on at SMC to run their Harney Coach division. After SMC's acquisition by Monaco in 2000, he and Storch began to seriously consider forming their own company. They opened Host Industries in 2001, focusing on the manufacture of slide-in truck campers.

Truck campers were a natural for Hogue, since he and his family used them constantly for their frequent weekend excursions. Recognizing RVers' desire for the compact design of a slide-in, but also for more living space, Hogue and Storch found ways to incorporate two, three, and even four slideouts into their campers. In 2006, Host introduced its luxury class C+ motorhome on a Chevrolet Kodiak chassis, with rear bedroom slideout. Still a privately-owned company, Host continues to thrive.

CONSTRUCTION:

Roof, walls, and floor are all vacuum bonded with aluminum framing and block foam insulation. The roof is topped with Thermoplastic PolyOlefin (TPO) vinyl. The walls are covered with fiberglass.

REVIEW BY RVCg STAFF:

Slide-in campers were Host's specialty when they first opened their doors in 2001. These relatively small to medium-sized campers (up to 11.5 feet in overall length) are among the priciest in the industry, which have occasionally exceeded \$50,000 at the top. However, they do use high-quality materials in their construction, and include some standard features that many other

manufacturers don't, such as Fantastic Fans. Heavy for their size, all models include at least one slide-out, and the deluxe Everest model has three, which certainly adds to the weight. Customization is available.

When we inspected the Host campers, we found that they looked solid, well constructed, and designed for comfort, spaciousness, and convenience. When you're looking at used, a well-maintained unit seven or eight years of age could be an excellent buy. More recent year models may still be priced as high as new models of other brands, some of which could serve your purposes equally well (although probably with fewer slideouts).

From JD: The Host slide-ins are definitely good, maybe even very good. I saw a number of them and came away favorably impressed. The few people we know who've bought one also think they are good. Because I've never felt that they were as perfect as the price would imply, I can't quite give them an "excellent" rating. Still, I'm confident that they deserve being close to the top—an 86.



The wet-bath in this Host slide-in shows that this company took a lot of care in building the amenities needed for even temporary living.

STAR RATING:



Interior RV

HISTORY:

Bob Mehrer, the founder of Interior RV of Penticton, British Columbia, Canada, started out manufacturing high-end fifth wheels in 1991. By that time, he already had over 30 years of RV industry experience under his belt, having worked in Canada at Skamper, General Coach, Okanagan, and Airstream. Thor Industries owned Okanagan at the time, and when they sold it in 1991, Mehrer got up the courage to start Interior RV and never looked back.

In addition to fifth wheels, they also built a few truck camper models as a sideline. When challenged by a potential customer to build a camper with a slideout, Interior rose to the occasion and produced the very first slideout truck camper in the industry in 1995. However, after trying out models with two slideouts, Mehrer decided to go back to the single-slide version, which they stayed with until the end.

Throughout Interior's years in business, Mehrer maintained a strong focus on customer service, which he claimed was the key factor that allowed the company to thrive with only four models and only four dealerships. He believed that his customers were his best advertising. Word of mouth apparently worked for Interior RV — at least until the recession of 2008-2009. The company closed its doors for good before its 2010 models were ready for sale.

CONSTRUCTION:

Roof and walls were wood framed and sheathed with plywood. The walls were finished with fiberglass. The roof was rubber covered, although a few vinyl roofs appear to have been produced just before they ceased production.



Watching truck campers being built, like at this Interior RV plant, is good education in RV construction techniques.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

The Canadian-built Snowbird and Snow River slide-in campers had a reputation for quality and a loyal customer following. These high-priced (\$30,000+) campers had a limited dealership network and may have priced themselves out of existence during the recession of 2008-2009, when they closed their doors. If you find a well-kept used model it could turn out to be a real deal. Here are a few comments we've received from owners:

"Interior RV's customer service is nothing short of incredible."

"I have traveled 7,000 miles this summer with the Snow River on the truck. This is the most trouble-free RV I have ever owned (my first truck camper). I am delighted. I was leery of the weight distribution of a camper, but my Ford seems to handle the weight (approximately 13,300 pounds loaded with gear and supplies) very well. Again, I am delighted!"

"Sadly, Interior Products is out of business. However, the ratings reflect my opinion of the camper and the company as long as it existed."

From JD: I saw the Snow River and Snowbird being built and was impressed. The ones I saw on display at shows passed my critical inspection with flying colors. I was sad to see them close their doors. If you find a used one, it should be like finding a pearl among the stones. The Snow River and Snowbird have both earned an 88.

STAR RATING:



K-Z

HISTORY:

Darryl Zook founded K-Z RV in 1972 in a gas station just outside Middlebury, Indiana. He started out building truck campers and camper toppers but, in 1975, when the company moved its operations to Shipshewana, he added small trailers as well. In 2009, K-Z manufactured a full range of towables from ultra-lite trailers and expandables to high-line fifth wheels and toyhaulers. They stopped building truck campers after the 2006 model year.

K-Z has survived economic downturns and continued to thrive by building to dealers' orders rather than building inventory. This has helped keep production costs down and won kudos from the RV Dealers' Association year after year. It also allows them to offer a large number of floorplans to the consumer. When a floorplan doesn't sell, it's deleted and replaced. K-Z's products are aimed mostly at entry-level to mid-priced buyers with the exception of a few high-line fifth wheels such as the Escalade.

CONSTRUCTION:

The roof is framed with wooden tapered rafters and insulated with fiberglass. The ceiling is luan and the roof is rubber, backed with oriented strand board (OSB). The wall paneling is luan with wood framing and fiberglass insulation, covered with .024 Mesa aluminum siding. Floors are tongue-and-groove plywood.

REVIEW BY RVC G STAFF:

K-Z built the Sportsmen truck campers from 1995-2006. At one time (1998), as many as six models were available. After 2002, as consumer demand for ever-larger motor homes and fifth wheels was on the rise, the company reduced their truck camper

line to two very basic models. After 2006, they were discontinued — at a time when most major companies had already dropped slide-ins from their rosters. Here's what consumers thought:

"Sold early this year and would buy back if I had the opportunity."

"Seems to be very practical and designed with the off-roader/fisherman in mind. Took a 3000-mile trip right after purchase in very cold and very warm weather, and we were very comfortable considering the size of the unit."

"Camper was talked up on all the blogs about how well K-Z stands behind them . I found out the hard way they do not at all honor their guarantee."

"Never been back to the dealer for a problem. Had a leak over one window."

"We found a leak in the roof a few months after purchase. Caulk-sealant failed."

For RVers who aren't too picky and don't need much in the way of amenities, a used Sportsmen camper could seem like a steal compared to what else is out there. The price will be low. However, we've never been sold on the quality of workmanship of K-Z in general. Inspect very carefully to avoid disappointment.

From JD: After studying K-Z polls from the buyers of their towables and slide-ins, the best I can do is give K-Z slide-ins exactly what the 36 buyers gave them—a 73. After looking at the photos and notes from RV shows over the years, I think this might be a bit high but today I feel that I'll be democratic and go with the vote.

STAR RATING:



Lance Camper Mfg.

HISTORY:

Lance got its start in 1965 when Richard Murray opened M&M Trailer Supply in North Hollywood, California. Once the company had established a reputation with its Lance truck campers, they changed the name from M&M to Lance Camper Manufacturing. With the gas crisis of the 1970's, Murray and his partner, Ron Mertes, decided to leave Southern California and sell the company to Jack Cole, who had started as a part-time employee, but had progressed quickly to management. With Cole as Lance's new president, Lance gave up its factory-direct policy and sold its product through a dealership network for the first time.

Over the years, Lance continued to expand, innovate, and introduce new products. Although Lance has occasionally flirted with the conventional towable, its primary focus and success has been the truck camper. For model year 2009, they did introduce a lightweight, entry-level trailer in response to consumer demand for lighter, more fuel-efficient RVs.

CONSTRUCTION:

Lances were "stick and tin" until about 2005, when construction began to change model by model and year by year. Now they have laminated roofs with Thermoplastic PolyOlefin (TPO) vinyl. Walls are aluminum framed, with block foam and fiberglass skins, locked to the floor and roof with custom extrusions. Floors are laminated, some with basements.

REVIEW BY RVCg STAFF:

Lance campers are popular with RVers. Not surprising, since they are well laid out and attractive to the eye, and the company has a good reputation for customer service. The feedback we've

received from owners, however, is a mixed bag. One could say that most of Lance's customer are satisfied — with reservations.

"After many thousands of miles, I do not have one complaint about this Lance truck camper."

"Had a number of minor problems that factory and/or accessory manufacturers took care of. I fixed a few things myself due to distance from dealer, which I'm sure they would have done if I'd returned there. Satisfied with Lance in general."

"The bathroom could be redesigned for a little more room, but overall, I'm very happy with this camper. It's the cheapest camper that Lance makes, but it seems to be put together very well. It fits two adults very well, but three adults can be a bit crowded. I would definitely recommend getting a Lance Camper."

"Lance seems to be working consistently to improve its campers. We look forward to owning our next Lance camper."

"We use this unit about 48 nights a year — most of the time on the beach. Lance is great."

"I purchased it used from the original owner. Have had zero problems thus far. Have



Inside and outside I like the Lance. These drawers are perfect and workmanship at the roof is excellent.



looked and found only minor flaws with construction."

"Final inspection and dealer prep needs more work. Some quality control issues found. However, camper is very comfortable."

"Pass-through window leaks and it was not fixed right. They put a Band-Aid on this problem."

"I would have purchased a new Lance 2 years ago. However, I feel that the company has compromised their quality in order to make higher profits per unit. I would like to see Lance go back to what made them a leader in the truck camper market. Quality first and then price."

When in the market for a slide-in, you would be well advised to do some comparison shopping. Indicators are that Lance is a bit pricey for the quality. We've seen other brands in the same price range that have them beat. But that's not to say that we wouldn't recommend them. We definitely think they should be on your worth-considering list.

From JD: The consumers love their Lances! At least, that what the close to 50 polls are telling me. Of course, I've watched the Lance over decades and know that they are high quality. I think this is another case where the buyers and users should have the biggest say. They give the Lance an 87—which, of course, is very good. I'm going to go with that score because that's exactly how I feel about Lance's quality in workmanship, design, and materials.



STAR RATING:



Lite-Craft Campers

HISTORY:

Lite-Craft Campers was founded in Denver, Colorado in 1988 by Jeff Bishop and Russ Myers when the pair of friends decided to build the kind of rugged camper they couldn't find on the market. The company received a boost in 1994, when Viking RV decided to sell their truck camper division. Lite-Craft scooped it up, and more than 20 years later, still a privately-owned company, Lite-Craft manufactures both pop-up and hardwall slide-in campers and is a major dealer for Century truck toppers.

CONSTRUCTION:

The roof is laminated, with a wood frame and fiberglass cover. The walls are also wood framed with block foam, surrounded by luan panels and a fiberglass skin.

REVIEW BY RVCg STAFF:

Lite-Craft manufactured the low-to-mid-priced Timberline truck campers from 1988-2009. It appears that they are currently out of business. We have no buyer information on this product.

From JD: I don't have much on the Lite-Craft, but the Timberline brand goes way back before many of you were born. I know that the quality of workmanship isn't too shabby, but I know little about the materials used and the build techniques. Still, I'm going to give the brand a 70 and bet that they'll come out somewhat better when I get a chance to inspect one close-up—whether new or used.

STAR RATING:



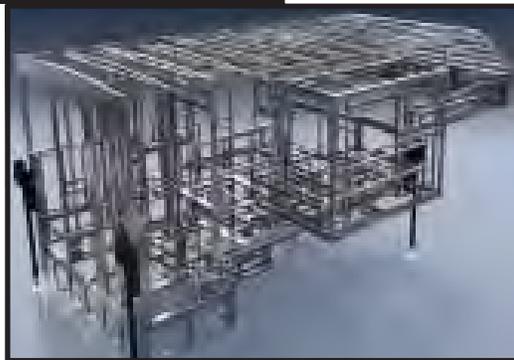
Livin' Lite

History:

Founded in Topeka, Indiana by Scott Tuttle and Rodney Lung, Livin' Lite started out around 2003 building folding trailers. Their first truck camper was built in 2010. In 2013 they were acquired by industry giant Thor. After a few moves they ended up in Shpeshewana under the management of their sister company K-Z RV.

Construction:

Aside from some optional wood in interiors, Livin' Lite's CampLite slide-in truck campers are constructed entirely of aluminum, composites, and other non-wood materials.



Review by RVCG Staff:

We liked the positive latches (brought back after a few years), the well-sealed counter, and were intrigued by the unique aluminum shower surround. Construction overall appeared sturdy.

We've had only one example of consumer feedback so far on Livin' Lite's products, and that was highly favorable. Because we have limited experience of them ourselves, we have to be reserved in our comments for the time being.

STAR RATING

Northern Lite Mfg.

HISTORY:

In 1989, a group of RV industry professionals founded Northern Lite in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada. Their goal was to produce a fiberglass truck camper that would fit imported trucks. In that same year, Mac Donkin and Lloyd Gartrell each purchased new Northern Lite campers for extensive travel across the US and Canada. They were so impressed with the product that they subsequently invested in the company. Finally, in 1994, they purchased Northern Lite outright.

Northern Lite's focus has always been to build a molded two-piece fiberglass camper of the highest possible quality. They've worked hard at maintaining that standard throughout their years in business. They upgrade their molds every year at considerable expense, but the result is worth it. While many other truck camper manufacturers have succumbed to the public demand for slideouts, Northern Lite never has. Most customers would agree that the design of the campers is sufficiently well thought out that a slideout — much less multiple slides — would be superfluous.

CONSTRUCTION:

Northern Lite uses a two piece molded fiberglass shell with block foam insulation. The floor consists of two layers of luan with plastic honeycomb sandwiched between.

REVIEW BY RVCg STAFF:

Comments from owners of Northern Lite campers are overwhelmingly positive:

"This camper is fantastic! We use it regularly and feel very comfortable in it. The quality and design is excellent! We receive compliments all the time when we are at our home park or on the road."

"The company stands behind the product completely."

We have only received one negative comment out of many positive ones:

"The steps were not designed for use with basement storage (17" riser at the top).

We've always been favorably impressed whenever we inspect Northern Lite campers at local RV shows and at the factory. They appear solidly built, made with high quality materials, and well designed for livability. Although Northern Lite campers are among the priciest on the market, their price tends to be in line with their overall quality.

From JD: I've been to the Northern Lite plant, seen them on dealers' lots, inspected them at shows, and have been shown them by owners. Although owners expect them to be perfect — which of course, they aren't — they still rave about them. All I can do is compare them with the others that still exist — and that is why I give them a 92, my highest rating for slide-ins. Oh yeah, the RVCG staff agrees with me on this one.



Watching Northern Lite work with molds was extremely interesting and enlightening.

Star Rating:



Northland Industries

HISTORY:

Northland Industries, makers of the Northland Grizzly, Koala, and Polar slide-in campers, is located in Nampa, Idaho. Founded in 1962 in Boise, Idaho by Ken Blacksmith, Northland is still owned and operated by the Blacksmith family. They are known for their well-built hard-sided campers, some of which feature a single slide-out. Their products are carried mostly by dealerships in the western states.

CONSTRUCTION:

The roof uses either aluminum or wood rafters, fiberglass insulation, and is covered with oriented strand board (OSB) decking and rubber membrane. Walls are wood framed with fiberglass batten, and are covered with either fiberglass or aluminum siding, depending on model. Floors are generally plywood, with a basement in the Polar models.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

Northland campers may not be familiar to RVers east of the Mississippi. However, the Grizzly, Koala, and Polar models have remained popular with outdoor enthusiasts in the western states. Even the entry-level Koala has adequate amenities for the price, and the mid-priced Grizzly and top-of-the-line Polar can compete favorably with more widely advertised brands at the same -- or even slightly higher -- price level. The following comment we received from an owner bears this out: "It seemed to be the best based on other manufacturers campers on hand when we were looking."

From JD: I found a bunch of photos of Northlands taken at shows and dealerships. I found only one with my finger pointing

to a flaw—the rest were positive. I know that the quality is good, but is it very good? From my research and a small amount of buyer input, I'm sure that this brand deserves an 80.

STAR RATING:



There were things I liked and things I didn't like about the Northland truck camper. The shower area was superb, the jacks were well supported at the corners, and . . . oh, oh! Well, this drawer was far from perfect . . . but, the material was good.

Northstar

HISTORY:

The R.C. Willett Company, manufacturer of Northstar truck campers, is located in Cedar Falls, Iowa. The company name encompasses three generations of Willetts, starting with grandfather Ralph, who founded the family's original company, Texson, in 1961. Ralph's grandsons, Rory and Rex, purchased Northstar from Pat Barner in the early 1980's and have shared the helm ever since. Their experience with the Northstar product taught them what they needed to know to build a better camper. The Northstar product consistently outsold their Texson product, and the company then switched to Northstar exclusively, keeping their basic design and prices. Over the years, they have updated equipment and materials and produced new models to keep up with the times. Northstar campers are manufactured in both pop-up and hard-sided versions, none of which have slideouts.

R.C. Willett has kept its head above water even in hard economic times. Its products are distributed by European as well as US dealerships and are found as far afield as Australia. Like the Energizer Bunny, the Willetts just keep going.

CONSTRUCTION:

Walls are framed with marine plywood and 1x4's with block foam inserted between. Siding is fiberglass. The floor is plywood. The company has claimed to use underlayments with low formaldehyde emissions.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

R.C. Willett's Northstar pop-up and hard-sided truck camper models encompass the range of needs that outdoor enthusiasts are likely to have. Ranging from 10.5 to 16.5 feet in length, the company has managed to keep prices reasonable.

Northstars tend to be a bit heavy for their size compared to

other manufacturer's products. One point that supports their quality claim is that they use a "premium underlayment paneling" with very low formaldehyde emission that costs considerably more than the material used by some other slide-in manufacturers. A high level of formaldehyde emission in the relatively cramped interior space of a truck camper could pose a real problem especially for people with any kind of breathing disorder.

Northstar is sold through a wide-reaching network of dealerships that span North America with inroads into Europe and Australia. We have only a few polls. Most indicate a healthy level of satisfaction with the Northstar brand.

From JD: From what I saw of the Northstar, it was maybe just a touch above average, which means you'll have to inspect each unit with a bit of diligence. I liked some things — but most of it was ho-hum. Still, it easily earns a 74.



STAR RATING:



Willett's Northstar interior was okay — but only that. No big flaws, but it was rough here and there — sometimes everywhere.

Northwood Mfg.

HISTORY:

Northwood Manufacturing, located just outside La Grande, Oregon in the Blue Mountains, was founded in 1994 by Ron and Sherry Nash. Ron was already highly experienced in all aspects of RV manufacture, having been general manager for one of Fleetwood's Oregon facilities.

Northwood started out with the all-wood-framed Nash trailers, added the Arctic Fox line in 1999, and the Arctic Fox truck campers in 2000. The first Desert Fox toyhauler debuted in 2002. All three types are still manufactured by Northwood.

Ron Nash partially attributes his company's success to the availability from the outset of a ready-made, capable workforce that had already worked for Fleetwood. Northwood, still a privately-owned business, felt the pinch of a difficult economy that hit the RV industry hard in 2008. Yet the company has stayed the course through good management, sound and consistent manufacturing techniques, and an unflagging commitment to customer service. In early 2009, they acquired Fleetwood's La Grande towable plant.

CONSTRUCTION:

Roofs were wood framed until 2005 when they switched to aluminum. Ceilings are carpeted and the decking is plywood covered with rubber. The walls also changed. Early models used wood framing with steel braces. Later models use tubular aluminum with wooden cores at attachment points. The skin is fiberglass. Early floors were wood framed and sheathed in diamond plate. Now they are laminated using aluminum frames. Flooring substrate is plywood.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

Northwood's long history of building the Arctic Fox slide-in

campers has shown that one of the keys to manufacturing success is consistency, along with a commitment to customer service. The following are typical comments we've received from owners over the years:

"I love my slide-in camper, and three of my friends have also purchased new Arctic Fox campers after looking at the camper I purchased."

"Only made one call to the manufacturer, and they answered my questions on that first call."

"We are very pleased with the RV and glad we did our homework."

"Love our Fox."

"This has been a great unit! The initial issues I had were resolved by the dealer and factory during a visit there."

"I couldn't be more pleased with Northwood's customer service."

"The issues I have had have been minor and handled professionally by both the dealer and the manufacturer. Though I do not expect perfection, they have come quite close."

"I have had 5 RVs over the years and this is by far the best quality and value of all. I have had a few problems and the dealer has



I found Northwood's Arctic Fox innovative in design with good attention to detail.



fixed them all at no cost. Very good value and well thought out in design and workmanship."

"We have not experienced one single problem with this unit since purchasing. It has been off-road a few times and on long road trips, short weekends, and nothing has worked loose thus far. The quality is superb although it's a bit pricey. You get what you pay for."

Before you get the idea that we're trying to sell you an Arctic Fox camper, the fact is that the above comments are overwhelmingly typical of what we receive. But that's not to say that the brand is totally without problems; it's just that when problems do crop up, Northwood stands behind their product. The one complaint we hear most often appears to relate more to their trailers than to the campers: Fit and finish — loose or sloppy trim and other little things inside and outside the RV. For example:

"Northwood does a good job in their form and function, but attention to detail needs to improve."

We've had frequent opportunities to see models of the Arctic Fox campers at shows, dealerships, and at the factory. Our impressions were as follows: Solidly built and insulated for all-weather use, not fancy — but attractive and comfortable for a couple, good materials and workmanship, good amenities for the price compared to other manufacturers. This reviewer never saw stray sawdust, metal shavings, loose trim, or other lack of quality control over a period of ten years of inspections. That's consistency for you. (Can't say the same for Northwood's trailers, though).

From JD: I've been watching the Arctic Fox since it was born and am still watching it. Buyers seem to like the brand; and if they do have a complaint, they are usually happy with the service. The score tends to go up and down but always stays in the very good range, which starts at 80 — the score I'm giving it. So, if you're looking for a truck camper, new or used, I think Northwood should be high on your list of possibilities.

STAR RATING:



nüCamp Cirrus

History:

Pleasant Valley Teardrop Trailer company was founded in 2005 as a trailer manufacturer. In 2016, after expanding from a 3-car garage to a large manufacturing plant in Sugarcreek, Ohio, they launched the nüCamp RV brand to replace the Pleasant Valley brand name. Cirrus slide-in truck campers were originally introduced in 2015 while Pleasant Valley was associated with Little Guy Worldwide. The companies parted ways soon after.

Construction:

Camper shells are assembled largely from components fabricated by outside companies. Framing is aluminum and walls, floors and roofs are laminated using composites. Walls are fiberglass skinned and roofs are aluminum. For the first few years most cabinetry was imported from Italy but was later built in-house.

Review by RVCG Staff:

We have always been impressed by the quality of workmanship and materials in products made by Pleasant Valley (nüCamp) and we haven't seen anything in the Cirrus to change our opinion. They may have even



From JD: Although I got a brief look at the Cirrus at a local RV show, I have been sold on the brand by what others are saying-which is usually a bit dangerous. However, in this case I think it might work. And I must admit that I was much impressed to learn that the company is privately owned. I'll cross my fingers on this one and give it an 80.

STAR RATING:



Outfitter Mfg.

HISTORY:

Brian Ward is a third-generation truck camper manufacturer, having learned from his dad, Robert Ward and his grandfather, Hubert Ward, of Hallmark Campers. Brian started Outfitter Manufacturing in Longmont, Colorado in 2001. His goal was to build a pop-up camper that combined the best qualities of both hard-sided and pop-ups in one package. The Apex and Juno, two of the Outfitter brands, have a basement that allows for extra storage space and holding tank space, but adds only four to six inches to the vehicle's height. The extra height also allows for a full-size entry door and more headroom inside the camper.

Outfitter sells its campers factory direct and does a fair amount of customization for its clients. Although the company was adversely affected by the business downturn of 2008-2009, and in fact, filed chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2009, a favorable arrangement with creditors helped reverse the situation and put Outfitter back in production. Ward is optimistic about the future, and plans to add new models to the lineup.

CONSTRUCTION:

Outfitter construction methods vary widely depending on year and brand. Generally, newer brand roofs are aluminum framed and skinned while walls are aluminum framed, fiberglass skinned, and vacuum bonded. The Apex uses foam-core composites with resin reinforcements.

REVIEW BY RVCg STAFF:

Outfitter is not handled by a dealer network, but is sold factory direct. All models are still pop-ups and the Juno features an expandable bedroom. Without information from consumers (who

apparently don't buy many) we can only urge you to tread carefully if you consider purchasing one.

From JD: Outfitter is such a small manufacturer that I found it difficult to collect good information. I would like to see better information on their website showing details of construction. Anyway, figuring they're from west of the Mississippi where most RV manufacturers do pretty good work, I'm giving Outfitter a score of 67. If they want better, they'd better step up to the plate with more solid info and get some of their units to local RV shows.

STAR RATING:



Palomino

HISTORY:

Palomino Camping Trailer (later to become Palomino RV) was founded by Vern Landy in 1968 in Savage, Minnesota. In 1972, the business, Vanguard industries, moved to Colon, Michigan near the Indiana border. The year 1973 saw production of the first fold-downs in the new facility.

In 1975, the company introduced their "Fold-a-Wall" series that incorporated hardwall construction with the capacity to fold down for travel. Over the next seventeen years, Vanguard continued to enjoy success with their camping trailers and to expand production. After the offices and major production facilities were destroyed by fire and rebuilt in 1992, production space was expanded still further.

Some time after that Pete Liegl, of the then-fledgling conglomerate Forest River, approached Vanguard and a deal was struck. Vanguard became an independently operating subsidiary of Forest River and eventually morphed into Palomino RV, which manufactures folding campers, towables, and truck campers. Sometimes things come full circle.

CONSTRUCTION:

Almost all Palomino models share laminated construction and TPO or rubber roofs. They also have fiberglass siding and the floors are one-piece treated wood with steel supports. The Wrangler, only built for a couple of years, was basically "stick and tin."

REVIEW BY RVC G STAFF:

Palomino products in general have not garnered great reviews from consumers. The gist of the comments we've received is mostly "thumbs down". The following sums up the consumer

response:

“The fit and finish is a bit sloppy. I also think the materials are unnecessarily cheap.”

When we’ve seen these campers at shows, our impressions were that they were just OK for short jaunts. Because most models of the Bronco and Maverick we saw were made with entry-level materials, we would not expect them to hold up well to extended use.

From JD: I love the palomino—horse, that is. The Palomino truck camper doesn’t garner the affection from me that the horse does. I’ve seen many Palomino RVs of all types and they still don’t touch a soft spot. My research tells me that most buyers wished they’d never heard the name. Some say that they’re terrible while only a few say they’re okay. So you see, by giving them a score of 60, I’m probably being overgenerous.

Rating:



Pastime Truck Campers

HISTORY:

Pastime Manufacturing of Mount Angel, Oregon has been building truck campers since 1987. Still family-owned and operated, this very conservative company builds good, entry-level slide-in campers at reasonable prices. Pastime keeps a low profile, with little advertising. Although they recently established a website, they long relied on word of mouth from happy campers — and Apache Camping Center dealerships in the Northwest. An encouraging word from RV forums is that owners of Pastime campers do seem to like them.

CONSTRUCTION:

The roof uses crowned wooden rafters, allowing room for up to 4 inches of fiberglass insulation. The covering is either segmented aluminum or rubber, depending on year and model. Walls are wood framed, insulated with block foam, and, with a few exceptions, sided with aluminum. Floors are 3/4" plywood.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

Pastime must be doing something right because they've stayed in business for over twenty years with limited dealerships and mostly word-of-mouth advertising. When we have inspected these models at RV shows, we have found them to be mostly small, very basic, no-frills campers that probably work well for short vacations or weekend excursions. In our inspections, we didn't find anything really outstanding about them, or anything really negative. Although the workmanship looked good, materials were just entry-level.

From JD: If you're looking at campers, are on a budget, and don't need a lot in the way of amenities, the Pastime should be on your worth-considering list. However, this is not a heavy-duty

slide-in. It'll take a lot of abuse on the truck, but its interior is not designed for fulltiming. If you want something light, built with above average workmanship, and on the inexpensive side (the kind I like) to occasionally pull a boat to the lake or a horse trailer to a show, the Pastime will probably work for you. Oh yes, I'm giving the Pastime a score of 79 — which is “good” and much higher than average.

STAR RATING:



In and out, Pastime impressed me with their attention to detail.



Phoenix Campers

HISTORY:

The manufacture of RVs — truck campers in particular — seems to run in families. David Rowe, who founded the Four Wheel truck camper company, and who now owns Tiger Motorhomes, is the father of Rob Rowe, founder of Phoenix Campers. Phoenix Campers of Denver, Colorado was the reincarnation of the original Four Wheel that took place after Dave sold the name in 1988. The name has changed, but the basic camper design and the company philosophy stayed the same. Phoenix campers were built for a time as Coyote.

Rob is a hands-on owner, doing much of the work himself at all stages of the process.

CONSTRUCTION:

Walls and roof are laminated, with block foam insulation and an aluminum frame inside a fiberglass skin. The floor is plywood. But since the campers are custom built, the material can be varied to the desire of the person paying the bill.

REVIEW BY RVCg STAFF:

The Phoenix and Coyote models appear to be sturdily built and intended for off-road use. Most are on the small side and designed to fit smaller trucks, with floor lengths of 5 to 8.5 feet. Materials used in the interior, however, are nothing to get excited about.

While the company formerly sold standard models through a limited dealer network, everything is now sold factory direct and their campers are "custom built to order." Although base prices for most models can seem quite low, prices can rise steeply with customization--equalling those of top-rated brands. Such luxuries as a shower and/or bathroom on the longer models can

drive the cost quite high.

From JD: I expect (and this is loosely stated) that the quality of these truck campers will prove to be above average. Because they are generally custom built, I expect them to be between good and very good. Still, I'm not going overboard because they're custom. I've seen some "custom" products that aren't as good as the price indicates they should be. I'll give the Phoenix and Coyote truck campers a 75 and feel a bit generous toward a product that I've never seen.

STAR RATING:



Recreational Technologies

HISTORY:

The Summerwind truck campers were produced by Recreational Technologies from 1999-2003. After that, this Huston, Idaho (originally in Caldwell) company simply dropped off the map.

CONSTRUCTION:

The roofs employed aluminum truss rafters wrapped with steel bands, and were insulated with fiberglass. Walls were framed with aluminum screwed and glued at the joints. Insulation was block foam with another layer of Fome-Cor foam board placed under the aluminum skin. The floor was laminated.

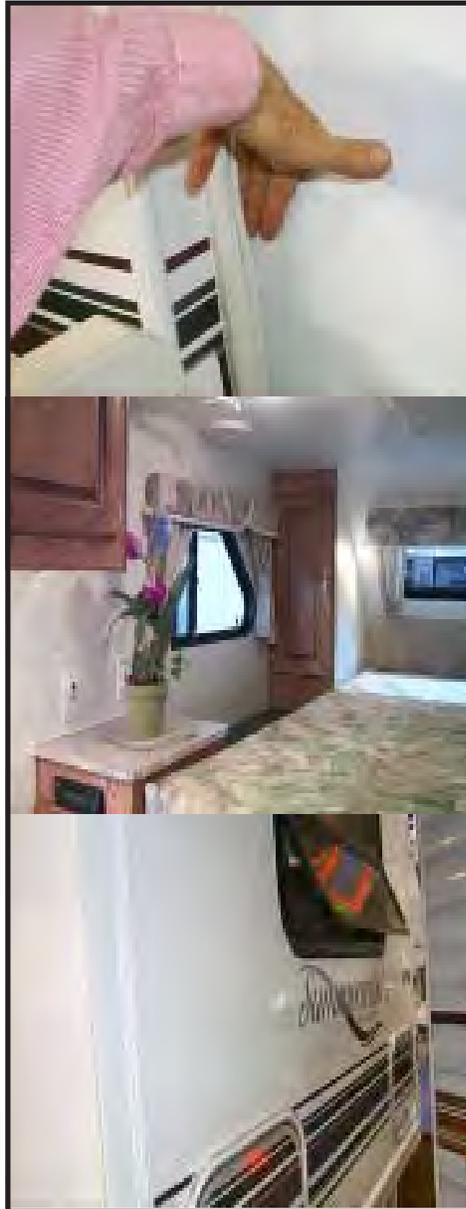
REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

The Summerwind truck campers were manufactured in 8.5 to 12-foot floor lengths, with a single slideout included in some models. Prices in 2003 ranged from a low of around \$12,000 to a high of over \$20,000. Perhaps they were a bit too costly for the time to be competitive with more established brands. In any case, nothing more is known about Recreational Technologies after 2003.

From JD: From the few Summerwinds I did get to inspect, the brand wasn't too bad. There were some design deficiencies, but the workmanship was okay — as was the material. From what I did see, I feel comfortable that the Summerland has earned a 70.

STAR RATING:





Although it looked like a good truck camper on the surface, there were things I didn't like about Summerwind by Recreational Technologies. The trim wasn't fit tight inside and outside. It was mostly workmanship flaws.

Roamer Advanced Rec. Vehicles

HISTORY:

Roamer Advanced Recreational Vehicles of Sarasota, Florida (and later located in Nokomis, FL) enjoyed a brief fling in the slide-in camper world with its aerodynamically-designed molded fiberglass camper. The company appeared to be an off-again, on-again business, producing campers from 1995-1997, and then again from 2001-2005, when they disappeared for good. Perhaps they were a bit too pricey to be competitive at the time, with models running between \$24,000 and \$29,000 without options and no slide-outs. Other companies better known in the industry offered slide-out models with more amenities at comparable prices.

CONSTRUCTION:

Although we saw the Roamer once, we didn't get information on its construction except that the walls, room and floor were all molded fiberglass. Actually, from the dozen photos we have, it appeared to be built like a miniature mansion (see photos).

REVIEW BY RVCg STAFF:

Roamer produced a slide-in camper that wowed the public with its sleek, one-of-a-kind looks at shows. However, there weren't enough buyers. Aimed at the upscale RVer, these large and pricey campers may not have been a good fit for truck camper aficionados. Or perhaps the company was undercapitalized. Or both.

We like the molded fiberglass construction of the Roamer, and the quality of workmanship, design, and materials inside and out is impressive.

From JD: Now this is a "WOW!" RV. When I took the photos at the show, I wondered who would buy such a fancy camper —

other than myself if I had the money. Anyway, after studying the photos and notes, I am absolutely sure that the Roamer deserves at least an 86 — which means very good. It probably deserves a 90 or better (excellent) but with no polls and no opportunity to give it a thorough construction inspection, I can't go there. But imagine finding one that has been barely used. Oh my! Just because I'm old doesn't mean that I can't dream.

STAR RATING:



The Roamer is the fanciest truck camper that I've ever seen.

S&S Campers

HISTORY:

Founded in the mid-1970's by the Sieler family in Kalispell, Montana, S&S Campers remained in the Flathead Valley, owned and operated by the same people for all its years in business. Although the company was forward-looking in its policies, adding new technology and materials when they became available and updating their floorplans and interior designs, S&S has stuck with the use of wood framing for its fiberglass-sidewalled campers and has resisted adding slideouts in spite of the trend in that direction.

S&S cut back its lineup after the recession of 2008-2009, offering only the Ponderosa models, then they simply ceased production.

CONSTRUCTION:

The roof is composed of crowned wooden rafters and insulated with fiberglass. An additional layer of Fome-Cor is placed over the rafters and topped with one-piece aluminum roofing, creased every 12 inches to allow expansion. Walls are framed with pine and fir stringers and plywood, with fiberglass and Fome-Cor insulation. Floors use 1x8" stringers and 3/4" plywood underlayment.



**REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:**

S & S is known for its mid-priced Bitterroot, Avalanche, and top-of-the-line Ponderosa models. Starting with the 2007 model year, they began cutting back their offerings, and in 2010, only the Ponderosa was being produced. We like the fact that this long-lived company did not succumb to industry pressure to add slideouts. In our experience, S & S camper models were well built with good workmanship and materials. Customer response to S&S products over the years has been positive overall.

If you're considering a used camper, an S & S from a few years back may be a good mid-priced buy.

From JD: I've always liked the S & S truck camper. It's a rather plain camper as compared to the Roamer (the "WOW!" slide-in), but it's been a great camper for the "outdoors" man and woman. I've found the workmanship good, the design close to excellent, and the material much better than average. It's definitely earned an 80.

STAR RATING:

Six-Pac Campers

HISTORY:

Both the Four Wheel pop-up campers and the Six-Pac hard-sided campers have their roots in cabinetmaker C.E. Benson's original company, Cabinet Works, begun in 1938. In 1967, they began building the truck campers that evolved into the hard-sided Six-Pac brand. In 2007, Tom Hanagan purchased both Four Wheel and Six-Pac. Six-Pac operations were based in Riverside, California until 2009, when the two companies' manufacturing plants were consolidated at Four Wheel's location in Woodland, California.

The wood-framed Six-Pac have always been billed as lightweight but, for 2010, Hanagan introduced their first aluminum-framed model, which is an effort at making them even lighter in response to consumer demand. Like the Four Wheel pop-ups, Six-Pac products were sold factory-direct, but suspended production in 2016.

Editor's note: Whether wood or aluminum framing makes for a lighter-weight camper is a controversial issue among truck camper manufacturers.

CONSTRUCTION:

Six-Pac used wood roof rafters until 2010, when they were changed to aluminum. In the mid-2000s, fiberglass insulation gave way when poly foam changed from optional to standard equipment. Aluminum roofing changed to Thermoplastic Polyolefin (TPO) vinyl. Wood-framed walls are now aluminum framed, but aluminum siding is still standard.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

The Six-Pac line of truck campers is the hard-sided counterpart to the pop-ups made by its sister company, Four Wheel. Both

brands are sold factory direct from the manufacturing plant in northern California. The Six-Pacs are relatively lightweight entry-level vacationing units designed to fit a variety of trucks, from compact to full-size. The company recently introduced the mid-priced "toyhauler" Sport-Pac with an overall length of 16 feet, which they claim is the very "first fully self-contained toybox/camper."

Six-Pac worked hard at keeping their prices reasonable and their quality consistent. If you spot a used one at a tempting price, you'll have to hone your inspection skills to make sure everything checks out. If you're not looking for luxury (and most truck camping enthusiasts aren't), Six-Pac could suit your needs.

From JD: The Six-Pac truck camper has been around, but not much around me. The little I've found from my research stock shows them as entry level slide-ins at the lower level of the price scale. The design is basic, the materials standard for entry-level, and the workmanship barely into the upper 60s. As I recall from my limited contact they are "okay" if you're not too particular and want to pay a low price for a basic unit. With all that said, I'm giving the Six-Pac a 68.

STAR RATING:



Starcraft RV

HISTORY:

Starcraft was founded in 1903 in rural Indiana Amish country for the manufacture of farm equipment. Boats were added in the 1920's, but it was not until 1964 that they rolled out their first folding campers. Later, pop-up truck campers and conventional trailers and fifth wheels were added. Although they produced class C motorhomes off and on, and even a class A during their last few years, this venture was not a stunning success.

Declining sales forced Starcraft into bankruptcy in the early 1990's. Following that, Jayco acquired the company. Since then, Starcraft has diversified its towable types, but continues its focus on lightweight, basically entry-level products. Both the old and the new Starcraft companies manufactured truck campers from 1986-2009, when they were dropped from the lineup.

In late 2008, Jayco announced the closing of its Starcraft plant in Topeka, Indiana because of the general business downturn. That closure apparently ended Starcraft's camper production.

CONSTRUCTION:

Starcraft camper roofs are covered with molded fiberglass. Walls are laminated, with a Filon fiberglass skin. The floor has steel supports.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

Starcraft made truck campers under one name or another since 1986, well before the Jayco takeover. Because Starcraft, as part of Jayco, is such a high-profile company and a favorite with dealers, we have quite a bit of consumer feedback on their products. Owners' reactions to the Pine Mountain campers are mixed:

"Delivered with many defects: Refrigerator inoperable, roof leaked, fresh water tank indicator inoperable, and on and on.."

"Roof leaked, setting up serious rot and mildew after first year. Floor delaminated and failed in third year. Starcraft refused to do anything but send instructions for floor replacement."

And yet:

"Quality and workmanship is reasonable and consistent with the price I paid."

"So far we love using it."

The kinds of comments we received may indicate occasional inconsistencies in workmanship and/or carelessness on the part of dealers.

The Pine Mountain line includes both pop-up and hard-sided models without slideouts. These are entry-level family vacationing campers with comfortable-looking living quarters, but are not designed to hold up to rugged off-road use. Workmanship and materials are just "average." If you spot a used one and the price is "too good to be true," it probably is.

From JD: I've been watching Starcraft brands forever and ever. It's had its ups and downs, but the downs were really down. It was never one of my favorites, but dealers liked it because Starcraft could and would turn out any shape or size they wanted. But the dream-come-true for the dealers was too often a nightmare for buyers. Sometimes it was constructed okay, but the workmanship was rarely good. It wasn't the worst workmanship I've seen by a long shot, but it wasn't anywhere near the best. Starcraft gets a score of 65.

STAR RATING:



Sun Valley

HISTORY:

Sun Valley Inc., manufacturer of truck campers and lightweight towables, was founded in 2000 by Mark Romanetz and Dan Morrison in Bristol, Indiana. Their company base consisted of the assets of former truck camper manufacturer Sun-Lite Inc., which they purchased that same year. Sun Valley flourished and grew over the next few years, continually outgrowing plants until, in 2006, they moved production to a still larger facility in Howe, Indiana, perhaps overextending themselves as the market was already in decline.

After moving to Howe, they also added a toyhauler, the Discovery trailer line, and had plans to unveil more new trailer lines. Less than two years after the move, gas prices and tough economic conditions took their toll and Sun Valley announced the auctioning of its assets in early 2009. Sun Valley was best known for its Road Runner and X-Treme towables as well as the Sun-Lite and Apache truck campers.

CONSTRUCTION:

The roofs were laminated, with block foam insulation and covered with rubber on Chiefs, while Warriors used one-piece aluminum. Walls were wood framed, with aluminum skin. Floors were plywood.

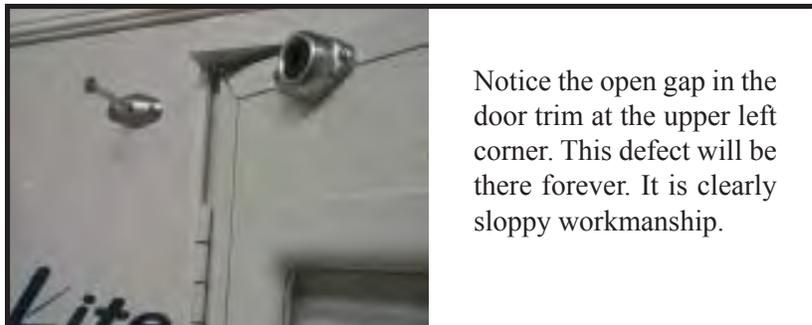
REVIEW BY RVCg STAFF:

We have few consumer polls on the Apache and Sun-Lite brands. However, if you are tempted to purchase a used model because it seems like a terrific buy — don't. First, we'll give you a couple of comments we do have, then we'll tell you why to pass:



"This is a low-end camper and it is built like one. Upon purchase, it had some problems that needed to be addressed before we could take possession of it. A lot of the paneling staples were attached to air and not the wood framing. The manufacturer's brochure said that this model camper included a gray water tank. It didn't come with one."

"Since this was a lower-end camper, I wasn't expecting solid oak cabinets with brass fixtures. However, the lack of quality and pride that went into building this camper was sad. The unit did not come with the accessories listed in the company's brochure. When the company finally decided to respond, the response was "the brochure was incorrect - besides we reserve the right to change our specifications." I needed to re-cement the carpeting back down, and silicone-down the carpet's edges so it would stop fraying. I had to rebuild one of the drawers, which had cracked plywood. Numerous pieces of the interior paneling were stapled to "thin air" instead of the studs."



"On the positive side, the camper's low weight and its center of gravity make it a joy to travel with. My comment to Sun Valley, though, is: Just because I didn't purchase a top-of-the-line unit, it doesn't mean the people building it shouldn't have pride in their work and have a quality control process in place to inspect problems before the customer takes ownership."

The above comments reflect our own inspections, whether hard-sided or pop-up models. The models we looked at should have been an embarrassment to Sun Valley in terms of the cheap materials used and some of the poorest workmanship standards we've seen — exposed cheap plastic pipes, flimsy walls, piles of shavings in corners, blobs of sealant here and there, unfinished sealing jobs, cheap and thin fabric. Yes, it's true they're not expensive and you can probably find a used one for practically nothing. But don't be tempted.

From JD: I agree completely with the RVCG staff on this one. You'd have to be awfully farsighted to think this brand is worth considering. I'm giving it a 50 (barely acceptable) only because they sold their products to people who should know better — and I feel sorry for those poor souls.

STAR RATING:



Don't let something like a fancy cap turn you on to a truck camper that's defective in workmanship and materials.

Tracker Marine

HISTORY:

Tracker Marine was primarily a Springfield, Missouri boat manufacturer that contracted with Fleetwood to build fold-downs, truck campers, travel trailers, fifth wheels, toyhaulers, and class C motorhomes to their specifications to be sold under the Tracker name. For a time, Tracker sold nearly the whole gamut of RV types — manufactured by Fleetwood, but with Tracker's brand names.

Apparently, the deal did not work out profitably for either party, and Tracker put all of its RV inventory up for sale in late 2000.

CONSTRUCTION:

We haven't been able to determine much for certain about these brands, but it appears the hardsided models used two techniques. One type was "stick and tin" but with a rubber roof and laminated floor. The other used aluminum rafters laminated with block foam between lauan and oriented strand board (OSB) underlayment, topped with rubber. The walls were aluminum framed, with block foam laminated inside lauan and OSB, and covered with Filon fiberglass. Floors were wood framed, foam insulated, and covered with plywood.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

Of the few rating polls we received on this brand, we had only one with a comment. Like the buyer said, it is definitely entry level. This means that it probably has some flaws but most can be lived with. It's really a Fleetwood built product, so you should be able to fix whatever goes wrong. Here's what this one buyer says:

This fifth wheel was entry level, of course. It has been very functional for us. Easy to pull and well behaved on the road. Had only two problems so far and they were taken care of by the manufacturer. One window leaked and there was a defective connector on the water line to the toilet. "

From JD: Since this is actually a Fleetwood product, it's easy to give it a rating of 68.

STAR RATING:



Travel Lite

HISTORY:

Travel Lite, Inc. manufactures truck campers at its New Paris, Indiana facility. Larry Johns, a veteran of the manufactured home business and of van conversions, purchased Travel Lite in 2000 just as the original owners were about to close their doors. By keeping the company small, its products competitively priced, and its factory centrally located, Dustin Johns, Larry's son, has managed to grow Travel Lite's business and extend its dealerships into Canada and Europe.

Johns is a firm believer in wood framing for maximum structural integrity (unlike some of his competitors who swear by aluminum framing), insulation qualities, and resistance to condensation. Travel Lite uses lighter materials to compensate in other areas, like countertops, and uses lighter plywood where necessary in cabinets and drawers.

CONSTRUCTION:

The roof uses bowed truss rafters insulated with fiberglass and covered with rubber. (Currently TPO) Walls are wood framed and fiberglass insulated, with either aluminum or hung (non-laminated) fiberglass siding. Floors consist of two layers of plywood with block foam sandwiched between.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

Travel Lite makes a range of entry-level to mid-priced truck campers for a variety of truck sizes. Only two models have slideouts. Although Travel-Lite has a wide US distribution, we have only one comment from an owner, and it "ain't pretty."

"It has a leak in the slide-out when it rains. My insurance company says it's a factory defect. The factory says it's my fault.

Not possible!"

Of course, we can't evaluate quality on the basis of one comment. These campers are supposedly built for the long haul and for rugged outdoor use. The company claims that they hold up so well that dealers can sell used models almost for the original new price! With an ever-increasing number of models and expanding dealership network, quality could be sacrificed in favor of production. We don't know for sure, but these are things to watch out for when considering a purchase. Nevertheless, a used model from a few years back that, after a thorough inspection, appears to be in good condition could be a good buy for those on a budget.

From JD: I saw the Travel Lite once (I think it was at the Harrisburg, PA show) during my travels, but I must not have been impressed enough to take photos or make notes. Still, I'm quite sure that it can't get much out of the "fair" range. but my conscience says that I should go easy. So, I'll give it a 68 and hope that I'm not overdoing it.

STAR RATING:



West Coast Leisure Homes

HISTORY:

The Okanagan brand towables and truck campers originated in a scrap pile deposited by a Penticton, B.C. lumber mill. One of the mill's employees took the scrap and put together a truck cap frame. The mill then started making camper tops and truck campers as a sideline and later moved on to trailers and fifth wheels. Subsequently, they were purchased by Thor. In 1991, Chris Epp, owner of Trav-L-Mate Industries, purchased Okanagan from Thor, upon which West Coast Leisure Homes of Canada was created. In 1995, Trav-L-Mate was discontinued in favor of the Okanagan brands.

In 1996, West Coast Leisure Homes extended their dealer base into the US, although the ups and downs of the world economy made it difficult for the company to remain competitive. Their expansion peaked in 2005 with the acquisition of Oregon-based truck camper manufacturer Intermountain RV. Although well regarded for their Okanagan truck campers, the company finally succumbed to hard economic times in the summer of 2008.

CONSTRUCTION:

Okanagans were fully laminated. Roofs were wood framed, insulated with foam, and topped with Thermoplastic Polyolefin (TPO) vinyl. Walls were wood framed, with foam insulation and fiberglass exteriors. Floors were basement-style with plywood floors. Ultimate Suite floors also featured wood and steel framing with Styrofoam insulation.

REVIEW BY RVCG STAFF:

Canadian manufacturer West Coast Leisure Homes, now out of business, built their Okanagan slide-in campers for off-road use as well as casual vacationing. Although our own inspections

have shown them to be average in most years, consumers apparently either love them or hate them. Quality could be up or down depending on the year. Here are a few comments we've received:

"A little known brand among the giant US brands, but 2 years of research made it clearly the best purchase decision we could have made."

"We purchased the coach from the original owners. We have used it four times now and are enjoying it very much."

"I would never recommend West Coast Leisure products to anyone. With all the repairs they put into this unit and what it cost, they would have been better off to replace it. I have told several dealers and RVers to never look at Okanagan again."

Designed for full-size trucks, either short- or long-bed, the Okanagans tended to be large and on the heavy side. In 2008, the last year they were produced, one model even had three slideouts, and the line included several others with one or two. The Okanagans could be considered mid-priced to expensive, with the top-of-the-line models bordering on the luxurious. Nevertheless, these campers were sufficiently well constructed that a used model in good condition from several years back could be a real bargain



I thought the workmanship on the Okanagan slide-in truck camper was lacking attention to detail.



and still give you years of service.

From JD: I have seen quite a few Okanagan products. Some were good and some not so good. (See the photo and look at the framing cut and then at the wall trim.) I'd like to say that they're average quality, but they're for sure a bit lower than that. I'm giving the brand a 67 because that's all it deserves.

STAR RATING:



Western RV

History:

Western RV was founded by Bill Doyle in the early 1970's in Yakima, Washington. The company quickly became known for their Western Wilderness truck campers. By 1981, they diversified into towables under the Alpenlite brand name that subsequently became their signature. In the early '90s, they limited their focus to high-end fifth wheels in the Alpenlite line. Then, in 1998, they entered the motorized sector with the Alpine Coach. At about the same time, Bill Doyle retired and the presidency was assumed by his son, Ron.

For close to seven more years, Western enjoyed success and continued expansion before hitting a brick wall of undercapitalization, high gas prices, and falling demand for luxury motor homes. Monomoy Capital Partners and Bob Lee of Country Coach purchased Western RV in early 2007. After a proposed merger with Pilgrim International (which subsequently closed its doors) fell through, Western RV shut down for good in 2008.

Construction:

Alpenlite campers were entirely aluminum framed and vacuum laminated, with block foam insulation. Roofs were generally covered with EPDM rubber although a few were built with TPO vinyl.

Review:

When Western RV was at the peak of its success before the recession of 2008-2009, its Alpenlite slide-in campers enjoyed a higher level of consumer satisfaction than its motorhomes and trailers did—and those products rated considerably better than average. The following comments are typical of the period before the business downturn:

"I am very pleased with the Alpenlite camper. The only complaint I have is that the dinette seats are a little high and when the dinette is made into a bed the bathroom is not very accessible. However, this is probably normal in a small camper."

"Very high quality and functionality."

"Excellent product; not one problem in over 10,000 miles of travel."

The following remarks all came in after 2004. Perhaps that's when things started to slide:

"Their designs are very good, but they really need to improve the skill level of their factory and service department personnel to attain the level of quality they used to produce."

"Initially, there were a number of dumb problems (hot water plumbed to cold, etc) which made me nervous about overall workmanship. Western RV went to great lengths to correct all the problems."

"I will not buy another Western RV product."

Our overall impressions of the Alpenlite campers were mainly positive. They appeared



Throughout the years, I found Western RV's Alpenlite very good but never perfect.

well laid out and constructed with good materials on a par with other slide-ins in their (rather high) price category. An Alpenlite camper in good condition made between 2000 and 2004 could turn out to be a good buy.

From JD: To me, the Alpenlite slide-ins and towables have been around forever. That's only because they came on the scene while I was one of the few RVers on the road. (Ah, those were the good old days!) Way back, Alpenlite was good but not very good. Although the Alpenlite and I got better as time went on, (like fine wine?) Alpenlite dropped a smidgen after 2000 while I steadily improved and stayed above ground while it went under. Anyway, I'm going to give the Alpenlite truck camper a 'very good' score of 82—knowing that it's well deserved.

Star Rating:



Western Canada RV (See Adventurer)

Westland RV Mfg.

History:

Lightweight camper specialist Westland RV is located in Penticton, British Columbia, Canada. In business for over 22 years, they've managed to weather the financial storms that have swept away quite a few other Canadian RV manufacturers. Their lineup also includes two lightweight trailer models with rear slideouts. Seven truck camper models are produced with floor lengths from 7.5-10 feet, all built with laminated fiberglass sidewalls and solid oak cabinets.

Construction:

The only construction information we could find says that the Westland has a "solid fiberglass exterior" and is "fully laminated and insulated." It appears that you'll just have to take a checklist and inspect it for yourself.

Review:

Westland is a very small manufacturer that, up to now at least, has made very little information available to buyers in the US. Their website is minimal, and not all pages were even accessible when we recently checked on their products. So far, we know of no one who has a Westland camper, and we haven't seen one ourselves. It appears that you'll have to visit their factory in Penticton if you want to see how they are constructed and get an idea of the quality.

From JD: For this one I'm going to have to punt. But because they are Canadian and a small manufacturer, I'm going

to give them my guesstimate of 70 and try to get to see one or two in the near future. (But, heck, Penticton would be a nice place to visit.)

Star Rating:



*Good luck on your ventures
and adventures!*

JD Gallant



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