

RV Consumer e-Magazine

March 2015

Volume 5

Issue 3



DISCOVER

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Tow Ratings Facts & Myths



❖ Axle Ratio Towing Tips

❖ RV Weight Terminology 101

Trailer Towing Special

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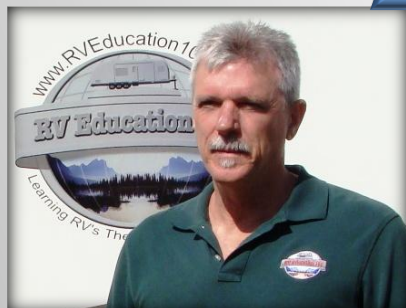
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There is a lot of confusion when it comes to safe trailer towing, and in my opinion weight issues are the number one reason for the confusion. There are weight issues concerning the tow vehicle and weight issues concerning the trailer. When the tow vehicle and trailer weights are not properly matched it can lead to disaster.

Truck and RV manufacturers have contributed to some of this confusion, and the lack of education on the topic is a contributing factor as well.

Towing a travel trailer or 5th wheel trailer should not be an unpleasant or dangerous experience. My goal with this month's issue is to clear some of the confusion up on the topic of safe trailer towing.

Sit back, relax and enjoy this issue of RV Consumer magazine.

~ Mark

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This helps accomplish two things; it eliminates the guess work as to which DVD titles go together, and it saves the RV consumer a significant amount of money with our DVD box set discounts. Our goal at RV Education 101 is simple; to help RV owners until they are comfortable operating and using their RV, and to make their entire RV experience safe, fun and stress free. [Browse the product catalog now](#)



Tow Ratings Facts & Myths



By Mark Polk

It's no secret that for years truck manufacturers have competed for truck sales by boasting to have the "best in class" tow ratings. I have always taken issue with this because the consumer is the loser in the end. Vehicles go through rigorous testing to determine tow ratings, but the problem is there was never a standard all manufacturers had to follow in determining a vehicle's tow rating. Unfortunately this results in biased outcomes.

Let's start with some background information

My journey into questioning tow vehicle ratings began in 2007 when I saw a television commercial advertising a Ford F-150 with a fully boxed frame could safely tow an 11,000 pound trailer. That

television commercial culminated in my [Let's Talk Half-Ton Trucks article](#).

A couple years passed and I wrote a follow-up article after reading a full-size pickup comparison test conducted by Edmunds in 2009. Among the competitors involved in the test Ford had the lowest horsepower and torque ratings, but claimed to have the highest tow rating. In the comparison test Ford came in last place, towing a 6,500 pound trailer with a truck supposedly rated to tow 11,200 pounds! What would happen if you added another 4,700 pounds to the trailer's weight to get to Ford's advertised 11,200 pound rating. I would be afraid to see. This resulted in my second article on the topic, titled

[2010 Update, Let's Talk ½ Ton Trucks](#)

Now it might sound or seem like I am picking on Ford, but they brought this on by claims they made and advertised to the public.

In 2012 a Ford truck owner wrote to me asking for help in determining what his actual tow rating was. He was confused because what he was told the tow rating was, and what was advertised in Ford's towing guides were two different things. After some research I discovered there were two different published tow ratings for the truck in question. That led to my [Why Truck Tow Ratings don't add up](#)

During my time spent researching and writing these articles I did see some promising light at the end of the tunnel. In 2010 I read information about a new towing standard called SAE J2807. This towing standard would be used to determine trailer weight ratings for tow vehicles. I don't always agree with mandated standards, government or otherwise, but this is one standard I am in favor of. The way it developed, very briefly, was several domestic and foreign truck manufacturers worked with the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) to establish standardized testing across the board for tow vehicle ratings. **The standard was written, revised, agreed on and established with an implementation date of 2013.** This gave all of the

manufacturers sufficient time to prepare for and implement the new towing standard. I applauded these manufacturers for voluntarily reaching this milestone, and anxiously awaited 2013 when the new towing standard would be implemented.

Unfortunately 2013 came and went, and one-by-one (with the exception of Toyota) truck manufacturers opted out of complying with the towing standard they all agreed to implement and use three years prior. That led to my [Truck Towing Standard SAE J2807](#) article.

Through my research and while writing these articles I discovered other troubling information. For example in my original article when Ford advertised that a 2007 F150 had a tow rating of 11,000 pounds they failed to mention that out of the 56 Ford ½ ton truck configurations available in 2007 only one model was rated to tow 11,000 pounds. And it seemed as though that one ½ ton model (rated to tow 11,000 pounds) only existed on paper. In addition to this one model not existing on dealer lots if you wanted to purchase a super cab, so there is room for the family, with 4WD and a short bed your tow rating is more like 6,000 pounds as opposed to 11,000 pounds.

2015 Update

These types of towing related problems have existed for 50 plus years as truck builders compete for our business, but it's time for this to change. That brings me to 2015. In the eight years since first

writing about this topic other variables have come into play that directly affect the outcome of vehicle tow ratings. Automakers are under pressure by new federal CAFE fuel standards and EPA regulations being imposed over the next decade. Truck sales play an important part in auto manufacturer profit margins. In an effort to increase fuel economy and remain competitive with tow ratings truck builders are using technology like engine cylinder deactivation, variable valve timing, six and eight-speed transmissions, improved aerodynamics and lightweight aluminum bodies.

The good news for the consumer is Dodge, GM and Ford are all SAE J2807 compliant for 2015. This at least means you will get a tow rating that was measured against a real standard. There should be no more of the “my tow rating is higher than your tow rating” mentality.

Other Trailer Towing Concerns

The J2807 towing standard helps a great deal but there are other concerns I have with vehicle tow ratings. Two of these concerns are:

- 1) Stopping all that weight
- 2) Consumer education as it pertains to published tow ratings.

Every time I see a ¾ ton truck towing a large 5th wheel trailer it makes me a little nervous. RV manufacturers are very cognizant of every dollar spent building a RV, but just like the towing standard it is long overdue that RV manufacturers upgrade travel trailer and 5th wheel trailer

braking technology with disc brakes. Disc brakes have been used on automobiles since the 50's and 60's. I don't understand why disc brakes aren't used on the larger heavier trailers these vehicles are towing. I understand the cost factor, but in my opinion from a consumer safety viewpoint it's the right thing to do.

Number two on my list was consumer education on manufacturer published tow ratings. Adopting the SAE J2807 towing standard is a major breakthrough, but there is more involved with towing a trailer safely than the published tow rating assigned to a vehicle.

When a manufacturer publishes a tow rating it is basically the vehicle's Gross Combined Weight Rating (GCWR) minus the vehicle's Curb Weight (CW) equals the amount of weight the vehicle can tow. In many situations this is what the consumer bases their buying decision on, without considering other variables that affect the vehicles tow capacity. Some, but not all of these considerations include: how much weight is loaded in the truck, how much weight is loaded in the trailer, the tongue weight or pin weight placed on the rear axle, payload capacity, exceeding the Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR), exceeding the GCWR, proper hitch and brake components, exceeding tire ratings, exceeding other component weight

ratings in the towing system and more.

This is a complex and confusing topic making educating the consumer that much more difficult.

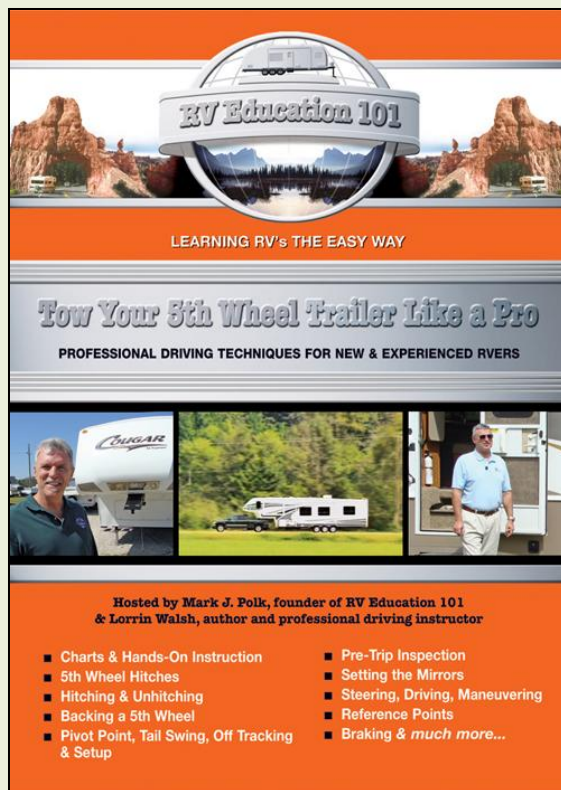
But the fact is if you base tow ratings solely on vehicle manufacturer published tow ratings, as a measure for safe towing, grossly overloaded tow vehicles and mismatched tow vehicle and trailer combinations are the result. This can be extremely dangerous to the occupants in the tow vehicle and to other people in the vicinity of these mismatched combinations traveling down the highway.

There is no quick and easy method to alleviate all of these concerns. If I had to try and simplify it as much as possible I would offer that you should purchase a trailer with a GVWR that is equal to or less than the vehicle's published tow rating. This way even if the trailer is loaded to maximum capacity the vehicle is rated (at least on paper) to tow that amount of weight. But I want to emphasize there is much more involved in the towing equation.

Several of our [RV Education 101 book and DVD products](#) address these towing concerns in great detail.

And you may want to try using this [RV Tow Check Calculator](#) for more information on a safe match between the tow vehicle and trailer.

It took a long time to reach the J2807 towing standard milestone and maybe through continued education we can make progress with some of these other towing related concerns. ~**RV101**



[Tow your 5th Wheel Like a Pro DVD](#)

Q&A with Mark

Question:

Hi Mark, Awhile back I read an article you wrote about the ideal ratio of hitch weight to overall trailer weight. The numbers you gave were 10 to 15% for a travel trailer, and the reasons you stated for this made a lot of sense to me. Recently I was talking to an RV salesman at our local dealership and he claimed that the tongue weight ratio didn't matter if you used a weight distributing hitch. I am not sure if he is correct or not. I would appreciate your take on his statement.

Answer:

He is correct about using a Weight Distributing (WD) hitch, but incorrect in saying the Tongue Weight (TW) ratio does not matter if you use a WD hitch.

Let me try and explain. The trailer's TW ratio definitely does matter. Too much trailer tongue weight placed on the hitch ball can cause poor steering, handling and braking, and too little TW can cause the tow vehicles rear wheels to lose traction and contribute to trailer sway.

The amount of TW does depend on the hitch system you use. The term Weight Carrying (WC) hitch means that all of the TW of the trailer is supported by the hitch itself. WC hitches are used for lighter trailer applications that don't require a WD

hitch.

Heavier trailers with more TW require a WD hitch to lessen some of the TW placed on the hitch ball and ball mount. When you use a WD hitch a portion of the TW is distributed to the axles on the trailer and the front and rear axles of the tow vehicle, so the actual amount of TW placed on the hitch ball itself is within the optimum range.

For the best towing scenario the amount of TW still needs to be in the 10 to 15% range of the fully loaded trailer's weight. This is why there are different size weight distributing hitch systems, so it can be properly matched to the trailer's TW you are towing. If you use a WD hitch that is too big or too small you don't get the proper amount of hitch weight or weight distribution and you are defeating the purpose of using a WD hitch in the first place. Your RV dealer should be able to determine the proper WD hitch for your particular application. **The short answer to your question is a resounding yes, the TW ratio does matter! ~RV101**

For more great RV information between magazine issues check out [Mark's Blog](#)

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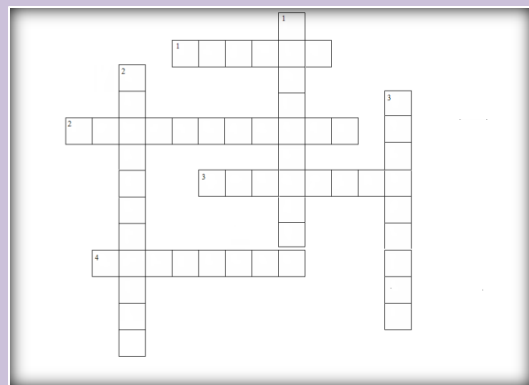
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Axle Ratio Towing Tips



By Mark Polk

How does the axle ratio affect fuel economy? Do you need a lower or higher axle ratio to tow a trailer? Can auto manufacturers build trucks that meet stringent government imposed fuel standards, and still offer the power and performance we expect from a truck?

Some Axle Terminology

Before we go any further let's look at what a vehicle's final drive or axle ratio is in the first place. To make it easier to understand the final drive axle or gear ratio you need a very basic understanding of what the different gears in transmissions and final drives are designed to do. A vehicle's transmission is made up of different sets of gears that can be changed, allowing

the vehicle to travel at different speeds. The gears used in the axle serve a couple different purposes.

- 1) The gears in the axle reduce the speed at the vehicle's wheels.
- 2) The gears in the axle divide the torque between the two rear wheels.

On rear wheel drive vehicles power is delivered from the transmission to the rear wheels by way of a drive shaft. So, the axle ratio of a final drive assembly is basically a comparison of how many times the drive shaft rotates (power coming from the transmission) in relationship to how many times the rear wheels rotate. Axle ratios are expressed in numeric values. For the sake of an

example a 3.73:1 axle/gear ratio means the drive shaft (or pinion gear at the end of the drive shaft) rotates 3.73 revolutions for each rotation of the rear wheels (or ring gear in the axle).

Keep in mind that RPMs play a key role in fuel economy, and that different axle ratios affect the vehicle's RPMs, especially at highway speeds. With that said you will soon see why some axle ratios are good for fuel economy while others are better suited for towing and power.

Fuel Economy Axles

For maximum fuel economy you want an axle ratio that is lower in the number of drive shaft rotations (pinion gear) for every tire rotation (ring gear). Examples of this would be a 3.21:1 and 3.42:1 axle ratio. These types of axle ratios result in lower RPMs, which in turn result in better fuel economy. These axle ratios are not suitable for towing and hauling heavy loads.

Towing Axles

For maximum power and towing capability you want an axle ratio that is higher in the number of drive shaft rotations for every tire rotation. The reason for this is the lower gear sets (higher value numerically) put more low speed torque, or towing power, at the rear wheels. The results are, less acceleration is required to get the load you are carrying moving from a dead stop, but there is an increase in RPMs at highway speeds. Examples of this

would be 4.10:1 and 4.30:1 axle ratios. These gear sets are better suited for towing and hauling heavy loads.

Note: The thing to remember here is different gear sets can drastically change a vehicle's performance characteristics.

When vehicle manufacturers build trucks and SUVs the base, or standard model vehicle usually comes equipped with a higher final drive gear set (lower value numerically) to maximize fuel economy. The problem is if you purchase the truck to use as a work or tow vehicle, the higher geared axle is not going to do the job. This is why auto makers offer optional axle ratios, as well as engine and transmission options for the vehicles they build.

What Axle Ratio Do I Need?

Selecting an axle ratio really depends on how you plan to use the vehicle. If your truck is going to be used for towing and hauling loads you want a 3.90:1, 4.10:1 or 4.30:1 type axle ratio. This puts the power at the wheels, but will sacrifice some fuel economy in doing so. If on the other hand, you need a truck that can tow a 7,000 pound trailer a couple weeks out of the year, but will be using it as a daily driver the rest of the time, you want a compromise when it comes to the axle ratio. In this situation a 3.55:1 or 3.73:1 gear set would be a better choice.

It's important you are not only aware of

the different types of axle ratios, but that you make sure the truck or SUV you purchase is equipped with the axle ratio you want or need to accomplish your goals.

You can take two trucks that are equipped identical to each other, with the only difference being the axle ratio, and the tow ratings can vary by several thousand pounds.

Today's truck manufacturers are not only confronted with meeting stringent government imposed fuel standards; they also need to deliver a truck that meets consumer demands for power and performance. And I must say they are doing a good job at both. Through technology like direct fuel injection, continuously variable valve timing (VVT), cylinder deactivation, six and eight speed transmissions, and aerodynamic design auto manufacturers are finding effective methods to compromise between fuel economy, power and performance. Truth be known, even with an axle ratio designed for towing your fuel economy doesn't suffer much in normal stop and go type driving just because of the axle ratio. The loss in mileage comes more at highway speeds, and of course when you are towing or hauling heavy loads, which is to be expected.

What I am saying is, a truck equipped with a towing axle will lose a percentage of mpg when traveling on the highway, but when you compare combined driving (daily stop and go and on the road driving) the loss is minimal.

Another consideration is your personal driving habits. This plays a major role in the fuel economy you will get, regardless of the axle ratio. I tested myself on this premise using my 2500 Dodge truck equipped with a 5.7 Liter hemi engine and 3.73:1 axle ratio. I usually average 16.4 mpg driving at highway speeds of 65-70. One day when I was traveling on the interstate I decided to keep the speedometer on 60 mph vs. 65-70. The result was 17.8 mpg.

Of course there are many other factors that contribute to fuel economy, like the load in or behind the truck, weather conditions, vehicle upkeep and maintenance, but this demonstrates that fuel economy is not based on the axle ratio alone.

The bottom line is fuel economy and towing axles are two distinctly different topics, but when you select the correct axle ratio for the job at hand, and combine it with new technology in engine and transmission design you can find a suitable compromise between the two.

~RV101

How will you
Remember
your travels?



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



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



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

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What is Brake Fade & how to prevent it

By Mark Polk



The brakes on your tow vehicle or motorhome were designed to effectively stop a specific amount of weight. When you add more weight to the equation it not only affects your stopping distance, but the heat generated by stopping the additional weight can lead to brake fade.

When I was in the military, in charge of large fleet maintenance operations, one of my goals was to teach vehicle operators how to properly use their vehicle braking system. When you operate a large and/or heavy vehicle, like a truck towing a trailer any extended braking can result in brake fade.

Brake fade is any reduction, from what would be considered normal, in the vehicle's braking or stopping power. Brake fade is almost always a result of overusing the brakes when you are hauling a heavy load and/or when descending steep grades and you repeatedly use the brake pedal to assist in slowing the vehicle down.

Some vehicles are equipped with auxiliary braking systems designed to help slow the vehicle down without overuse of the foot brake.

Auxiliary braking systems are usually some type of exhaust brake or transmission retarder. The goal of any auxiliary braking system is to help slow the vehicle down without relying on the vehicle brakes alone to do it.

Note: If your vehicle is equipped with a transmission retarder watch the transmission temperature gauge whenever you use the retarder. The transmission fluid temperature can quickly start to rise resulting in other problems.

If your vehicle is not equipped with an auxiliary braking system you can slow

the vehicle down by shifting the transmission into a lower gear and using the tow/haul mode if equipped.

Our motorhome is heavy and I am always cautious of the stopping distance and relying solely on the vehicle brakes to slow the RV down, especially when descending steep grades. The transmission on our 2006 Ford F53 chassis has a Tow/Haul mode that also provides engine braking to assist in slowing the vehicle down.

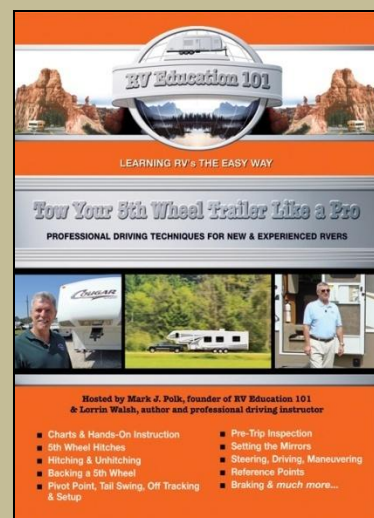
The key to preventing brake fade is to avoid overuse of the brake pedal. Any auxiliary braking feature helps avoid brake fade when descending a grade. If you don't have an auxiliary braking system you can place the transmission in a lower gear and descend the hill at a slower speed to prevent the vehicle speed from increasing to the point you need to rely solely on the brake pedal to slow down.

Tip: If you are towing a trailer you can manually apply the trailer brakes periodically to help slow the tow vehicle and trailer down when descending grades, but don't overuse the trailer brakes either.

Using the brake pedal sporadically when descending grades, as opposed to constant pressure, and placing the transmission in a lower gear will dramatically lower the potential for brake fade issues. ~**RV101**



[Drive your Motorhome Like a Pro](#)



[Tow your 5th Wheel Like a Pro DVD](#)

RV Weight Terminology 101

I mentioned earlier that RV weights and terminology can be confusing. There are weight ratings established by manufacturers not to be exceeded, and there are actual weights. One aspect commonly overlooked is the weight you add to the tow vehicle or trailer. It's important you have a basic understanding of some RV weight terminology to help ensure your tow vehicle and trailer are properly and safely matched.

Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW): This is the actual weight of the tow vehicle. To get this weight take the **fully loaded** tow vehicle to a public scale and have it weighed. If possible try to weigh each axle and individual wheel position to determine if you are within the Gross Axle Weight Rating limits and the tire weight rating limits. Make sure you include the hitch weight too.

Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR): Both the tow vehicle and the trailer have a GVWR. This is a rating, not to be exceeded, and is the maximum amount of weight the axles and other components on the vehicle or trailer can support before something is overloaded.

Curb Weight (CW): This is the actual weight of the tow vehicle. It includes all fluids and full fuel tank, but does not include the weight of the driver, any passengers, optional equipment, aftermarket installed equipment, or cargo you add to the tow vehicle.

Gross Trailer Weight (GTW): This is the actual weight of the trailer. Follow the same information as the GVW to determine GTW. Make sure the trailer is **fully loaded** for travel.

Unloaded Vehicle Weight (UVW): This is commonly referred to as "Dry Weight (DW)" and it is the weight you will see published in brochures. It is the empty weight of the trailer, as built at the factory and usually does not include any options, aftermarket accessories, LP gas or water.

Gross Axle Weight Rating (GAWR): is the maximum amount of weight each can support. If you overload an axle you are overloading a one or more components of that axle. This usually results in exceeding the GVWR as well.

Net Payload (NP): This is the amount of weight that can be put in or on the truck after you subtract the weight of the driver, passengers and any optional or aftermarket equipment.

Gross Combined Weight Rating (GCWR): This is an important weight rating that is overlooked many times. The GCWR is the maximum permissible weight of the truck and trailer combined, when both are fully loaded for travel. The **Gross Combined Weight (GCW)** is the actual weight of truck and trailer combined and fully loaded for travel.

Tongue Weight (TW): or pin weight for a 5th wheel trailer is the weight of the trailer's tongue or pin pressing down on the truck. This should be 10 to 15% of a loaded travel trailer's weight or 15 to 25% of a loaded 5th wheel trailer's weight.

This is not every weight rating you need to be concerned with, but it's a good start. **~RV101**

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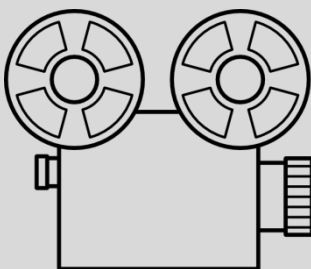
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You can subscribe to our channel and get notified every time we post a new video. We currently have over 225 RV Education 101 produced videos posted on our YouTube channel with over 14,000 subscribers and nearly 4,000,000 video views.

It's a great place to learn more about your RV and keep up with what is new and exciting in the RV industry.

RV Video of the Month

LED Lighting is becoming more popular in RVs and there is good reason. LED lights use less power, are brighter and last longer than conventional lighting. Check out this RV LED lighting video of the month.



[RV LED Lights with Dimmer & Wireless Wall Switch](#)

Getting to



Green RV Series Pt.2 Using your RV

In part one of the Green RV series we discussed how keeping your RV in top operating condition, and the way you tow or drive the RV can affect fuel savings and contribute to a smaller carbon footprint on the environment.

Today in part two of the series we will look at some green RV tips concerning the water, electric and LP gas systems on our RVs. Let's get started.

If you think about it RVs are environmentally friendly by design. We are only heating 6 or 10 gallons of water as opposed to 40 or 100 gallons like at home. It is more efficient to heat and cool the RV simply because of the amount of space we are heating or cooling, as compared to our homes. And lots of devices in our RV use 12-volt DC power rather than 120-volt AC power like at home.

So, what can we do to help the green initiative even more?

RV Water, Electric and LP gas Systems:

When we leave on a RV trip we only

fill the fresh water tank with enough water to get to our destination, unless we will be boondocking where potable water isn't available. This helps reduce weight in the RV.

When we get to our destination we hook up to the water supply and do whatever we can to conserve the water. We heat the water in using LP gas rather than electricity, and only turn the water heater on we need hot water. The hot water in the tank will stay warm for several hours after the water heater is turned off. It's usually still warm enough the next morning to wash up and shave without needing to turn it back on.

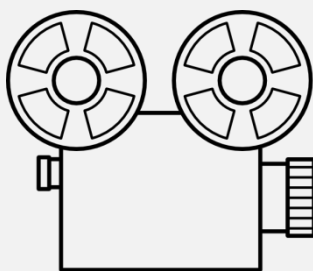
Don't let the water run continuously when you brush your teeth, wash up or shave. Install a water flow restrictor on the shower and try to limit your showers to five minutes or less. We take jugs filled with water from home for our pets drinking water and we filter all of the water coming into the RV for all other uses.

Try to avoid using the RV air conditioner whenever possible. If you park the RV on a shady site, use the awnings, open windows and use 12-volt fans you can keep the RV interior cool and comfortable. Install energy

saving LED lights and use LP gas and 12-volt devices whenever you can, rather than energy hungry 120-volt devices and appliances. Try to limit using 120-volt electronic devices in the RV whenever you can and when you aren't using something make sure you turn it off.

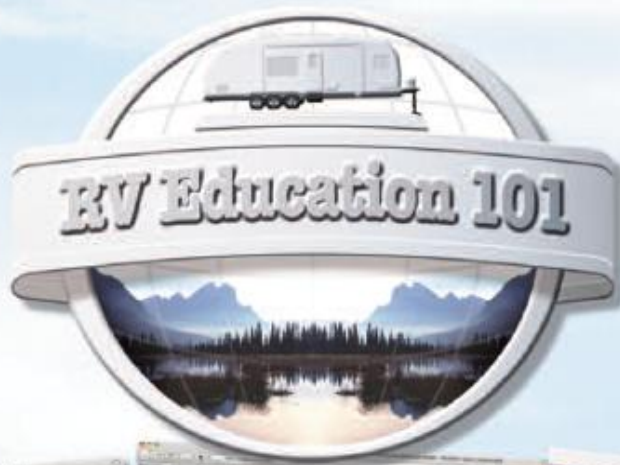
Take advantage of the camping environment and enjoy cooking outside on the grill rather than using the microwave.

These are just a few easy things every RV owner can do to help with the green RV initiative as it pertains to the systems on our RVs. If you want to do even more you might want to consider investing in solar panels and maybe even a composting toilet. Everything we do helps contribute to a cleaner safer environment so future generations of campers can enjoy visit the places we do and enjoy the RV lifestyle. Be sure and check back for part three of our green RV series when we discuss green camping and campground tips. Happy camping, **RV101**



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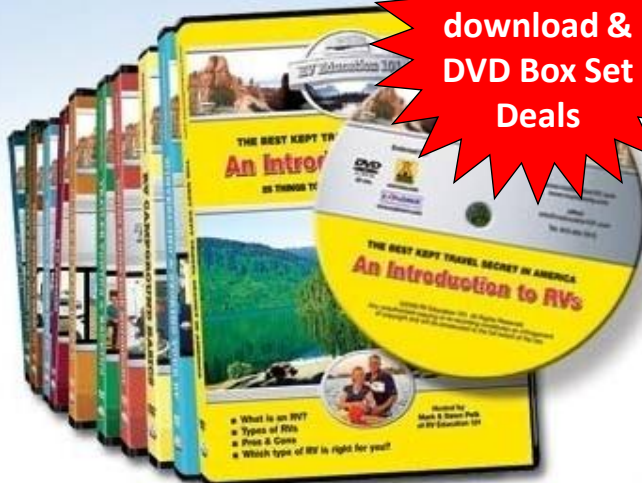


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Our goal with RV Consumer E-Magazine is to provide you with helpful information to make all of your RV experiences more enjoyable. I left my position as an RV Sales and F&I manager in 2000 to start RV Education 101.

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

My wife Dawn left her position in RV sales to help start the company, and is our Sales and Marketing Director. We currently have a 35-foot Class A motor home that we travel in with our two dogs, Roxie and Gracie. To learn more about us and RV Education 101 please visit www.rveducation101.com

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