



The Lowdown on TrailManor

The secret of their success is keeping a low profile

TrailManor has spent three decades building nothing but lightweight travel trailers. The company has employed the same lift system for their collapsible trailers since the mechanism's debut in 1983, and even those didn't stray much beyond the original prototype created by founder Bill Hulsey in the mid-

1970s. The business continues to be a family-run venture, with no thought of changing.

Despite all this sameness, TrailManor is far from set in its ways, not if the past year was any indication.

According to TrailManor's vice president of sales and marketing, Keith Hulsey, 2004 marked a major departure for the company's name-sake brands. All eight travel-trailer models received significant upgrades in terms of aesthetics for 2005. In short, they went upscale.

"Many of our

owners drive \$40,000 SUVs and minivans," says Hulsey. "We're matching that quality by upgrading our trailers to current residential trends—Berber carpeting, slate vinyl floors, maple cabinetry instead of oak."

Hulsey says the movement to nicer interiors was customer-driven. New standards, including fluorescent kitchen lighting, pewter hardware, an A/C heat strip, telephone and park cable connections, a 20,000-Btu furnace, a second patio light and granite-looking countertops ranked chief among them.

TrailManor, which

was never in the market to make the least- or most-expensive travel trailers (current models range from \$21,000 to \$33,000), continues to attract not only first-time buyers but a surprising number of downsizing RVers.

"Personally, I'd hate to be in the business of selling the same thing everyone else was selling," says Hulsey, pointing to TrailManor's expandable floor plans, fiberglass exteriors and unique lift system that creates precious extra feet upon arrival. "Once you start doing that, you're just selling on price. We're selling on what people are looking for."

And what people are looking for, he says, is a nice trailer to match their pricey tow vehicle sitting in the driveway. However, many customers don't want the towing hassle or storage issues of buying a larger, more traditional travel trailer. TrailManor has always been able to give customers the best of both worlds.

Start with the waifish weights: none of TrailManor's eight models exceeds 3,520 pounds. Towing lengths are also manageable, ranging from 19 feet, 3 inches to 26 feet, 3 inches. And with their new swing-around tow hitch, owners save precious feet for garage storage.

That innovation came as big news to owners who wanted to keep their trailers closer to home. The mechanism acts just as its name suggests, with the hitch actually unlocking and swinging around to the side of the



trailer. Suddenly, a 19-foot unit becomes a 17-footer, which makes getting the garage door down that much easier. The development was another coup for the company that has made a practice of letting customers have their cake and eat it too in terms of weight and length.

"Everything we do to this trailer is trying to make something that's a small package to tow and a big trailer when you get out camping," says Hulsey. "We're basically the only manufacturer that makes a big travel trailer that you can store in the garage and tow with a minivan."

Obviously, the lift system is the key to the operation, allowing customers a unique yet lightweight option for getting more trailer than ever. The 19-foot 2619 model, for instance, opens to nearly 23 feet upon arrival. The largest of the bunch, the 3326 King, expands from 26 feet to nearly 30 feet.

The lift system deploys in minutes and is completely counterbalanced, meaning travelers needn't struggle with tiresome heave-ho's. "It's like lifting a trunk lid on a car," says Hulsey. "It only takes about 20 pounds of force to lift the top." The trailer may even remain attached to the tow vehicle during setup.

Hulsey says the company kept the lift operation a manual process to avoid any motors or cables that could wear down or require service over time. "This is probably the only trailer that goes up and down that has never failed to go up or down," he says. The lift system carries a lifetime warranty.

—BRENT PETERSON



TrailManor

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