

Buying Our New to Us Travel Trailer

How our family balanced space comfort towing limits and budget

Our search began with a simple goal: replace a cramped 20 foot trailer with a used travel trailer that gave our family more usable space, remained within our truck's ratings, fit the campgrounds we enjoy, and stayed near our \$18,000 budget. The search took about seven months and required more compromises than we expected.

Why We Needed a Different RV

We previously owned a 2020 Riverside Retro, a 20 foot travel trailer without a slide-out. It was a nice little trailer, but we quickly learned that it was too small for our family.

When my wife and I traveled with our daughter and two grandchildren, there simply was not enough room. The trailer had a sideways queen bed in the front, bunk beds, and a dinette that converted into another bed. Once everyone was inside, especially at bedtime, the trailer felt very crowded.

There was so little open floor space that we had to take turns changing our clothes. The bathroom was too small to change in, and the bathtub was so small that we eventually used it for storage instead of bathing.

We enjoyed the trailer and the memories we made in it, but it taught us an important lesson: an RV can have enough beds on paper and still not have enough usable living space for the people sleeping in it.

Making Room for the Next Trailer

We sold the 2020 Riverside Retro for two important reasons. Selling it gave us room at home to park a larger trailer, and the money from the sale could be put toward our next new-to-us travel trailer.

Our experience also helped us understand what we wanted in the replacement. My wife wanted a walk-around queen bed; a larger bathroom with storage, counter space around the sink, a bigger shower, and room to change clothes; a couch and dining table; a separate bunk room; an outdoor kitchen; and plenty of exterior storage.

I wanted a trailer around 30 feet or shorter, a more usable bathroom, a walk-around queen bed, a U-shaped dinette, a separate couch that could make into a bed, slide-outs, solar power, a backup camera, two batteries, and enough electrical capacity and storage for our camping and ham-radio equipment.

Learning What Our Truck Could Handle

At first, we considered trailers as long as 35 feet with a Gross Vehicle Weight Rating of approximately 10,000 pounds. Those larger trailers offered many of the features we wanted, including separate bunk rooms, spacious bathrooms, multiple slide-outs, and plenty of storage.

Then we looked more closely at our tow vehicle, a 2014 Ram 1500 4x4 Quad Cab with the Hemi engine and factory tow package. With ChatGPT's help, we learned that the Hemi and tow package did not automatically mean the truck could tow every trailer advertised below 10,000 pounds.

The truck's axle ratio, payload capacity, Gross Combined Weight Rating, receiver-hitch rating, and allowable tongue weight all had to be considered. Passengers, cargo, the hitch, batteries, propane, and anything carried in the truck also reduce the available payload.

We also discovered that some campgrounds we enjoy cannot accommodate trailers longer than approximately 30 feet. Even if we could tow a longer trailer, its size could keep us out of some favorite places.

Our goal changed from finding the biggest trailer with every feature to finding the best balance of safety, comfort, campground access, and price. That meant giving up some wants.

Now the Search Begins

Once we understood what our truck could handle, the real search began. Some trailers had bunk beds and a dinette but no couch. Others had a dinette and couch but no bunk beds. Some had an outdoor kitchen but no U-shaped dinette. A few were close to perfect but were too heavy, too long, or too small for our family.

After looking at many floor plans, I narrowed my must-have list to a U-shaped dinette that could convert into a bed, a separate couch that could also be used for sleeping, a walk-around queen bed, an overall length of approximately 27 to 30 feet, and a GVWR under 8,000 pounds while remaining within every rating of our truck.

My wife was willing to give up the separate bunk room, but she still wanted the queen bed, table, couch, bunk beds, larger bathroom, and good storage. Solar panels, two batteries, a backup-camera system, slide-outs, an outdoor kitchen, and extra storage remained desirable, but some of those items could be added later. The floor plan, length, and weight could not be easily changed.

Where We Searched

We searched RV websites, Facebook Marketplace, OfferUp, and other online listings. There were thousands of trailers for sale across the country, but we limited the search to

approximately 100 miles from home. Traveling farther could mean spending an entire day and a lot of fuel to inspect one unsuitable trailer.

We visited five trailers during the early search. Unfortunately, several looked very different in person than in their online photographs. Some were smaller than expected. Others had damage, poor layouts, or conditions the advertisements did not show. Each disappointing visit cost us time and gas.

We considered dealerships, but markups and added charges put many trailers outside our budget, so we concentrated mostly on private-party listings. After about two months, my wife gave up two more wants and told me to find the trailer that best matched my main requirements.

Even with fewer requirements, online descriptions were often incomplete or inaccurate. Sellers sometimes gave the wrong length or weight, and photographs often failed to show the bathroom, storage compartments, roof, tires, damage, or complete floor plan. Sometimes we could not tell whether a trailer had a U-shaped dinette, separate couch, or true walk-around queen bed.

After about seven months, I was ready to give up. The experience taught us to request the exact model number, VIN, overall length, GVWR, clear photographs, and a complete walk-through video before making a long drive.

Breaking My Own Rule

Then I broke my own rule. Camping World advertised a Labor Day weekend sale, so I called and explained that I wanted a used travel trailer under 30 feet and under \$18,000. I was told they should be able to find something, so I visited on Sunday.

At the dealership, the salesperson said they had nothing in that range and admitted that people answering the telephone sometimes say whatever is necessary to get customers into the store. I was not happy, and I left without looking at anything.

An Unexpected Stop Next Door

Since I was already there, I visited the RV SuperCenter next door. Their salesperson said they had two recently arrived used trailers that were close to my price range. He was upfront that neither had completed the dealership inspection.

Feature	2019 Coachmen Apex 245BHS	2012 Forest River Rockwood 2703SS
Listed price	\$19,995	\$15,995
Length	About 28 feet	About 32 feet
Dry weight	4,586 pounds	6,048 pounds
Sleeping capacity	Up to eight	Up to six
Slide-outs	One	Two
Layout	Bunk beds and outdoor kitchen	Rear living area and front bedroom
Main compromise	No couch and small bathroom	No bunks or outdoor kitchen

Neither trailer had everything. The Coachmen was closer to our preferred length and had bunks and an outdoor kitchen, but it lacked the couch and larger bathroom. The Rockwood offered more interior space, two slide-outs, and a lower advertised price, but it exceeded our 30 foot goal and had no bunks or outdoor kitchen. We knew we had to give up something.

Making an Offer on the Rockwood

After going back and forth, I asked for the best deal on the Rockwood. Before I would tow it home, it needed:

- New tires
- New awning fabric
- New skirting on the driver's side
- An equalizer hitch and sway-control bars
- A battery
- A complete safety inspection, including bearings, brakes, lights, appliances, plumbing, and electrical systems

The RV SuperCenter offered an out-the-door price of \$17,999, including the trailer, requested repairs and equipment, sales tax, registration, and dealership fees.

The deal looked good, but my wife had not seen the trailer. The dealership agreed to hold it until the end of the day, giving us about five hours. I went home, explained the offer, and brought her back to inspect it. After about an hour of looking and discussing the compromises, she agreed that the Rockwood was the better choice.

I gave the RV SuperCenter a \$1,000 deposit so they could hold the trailer and complete the inspection and repairs. We planned to pick it up the following Saturday, provided the parts arrived and the trailer passed inspection.

One More Upgrade

The next day, I remembered that the Rockwood did not have a backup camera. The RV SuperCenter quoted about \$950 for the camera system and \$585 for installation, a total of \$1,535.

I found the camera system on sale at Amazon for \$641.71 and knew I could install it myself. Buying it separately would save about \$893, so the camera became one upgrade I planned to handle on my own.

What We Learned

Our new-to-us trailer did not meet every requirement on the original list. It was about two feet longer than planned, and we gave up the bunk beds and outdoor kitchen. In return, it gave us a walk-around bed, couch, dining area, larger living space, two slide-outs, manageable weight, and an out-the-door price within our budget.

The search taught us that the right RV is not necessarily the one with every feature. It is the one that balances the family's most important needs with the tow vehicle's confirmed ratings, campground limits, condition, and total cost. Before towing, every owner should verify the truck and trailer labels, actual loaded weights, hitch limits, payload, axle ratings, and applicable requirements for the specific combination.

Safety Upgrades for Our New to Us Trailer

Two of our first planned upgrades focus on seeing what is around the trailer and monitoring the tires while traveling.

Furrion Vision S Plus Wireless Three Camera RV System \$641.71

This system includes a 7 inch touchscreen, one 1080p rear camera, two side-view cameras with LED marker lights, night vision, SD recording capability, and a long-range wireless connection. An SD card is not included. Installing it myself avoids the dealership's labor charge.

[View the Furrion three-camera system on Amazon](#)

Tymate TM2 Tire Pressure Monitoring System \$79.99

The Tymate TM2 has four external sensors and can monitor as many as 10 tires. It provides six alarm modes, a range up to 144 PSI, a color LCD, and solar or USB charging. It can warn us about pressure or temperature problems before they become a roadside emergency.

[View the Tymate TM2 on Amazon](#)

Amazon link notice: Prices can change. These links may earn HamRadioRVing.org a commission at no additional cost to the buyer.