

A YEAR IN A TEAR

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ALASKA

Calling

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Alaska



*Teardrop
Legacy*

The works of
Christopher Walker



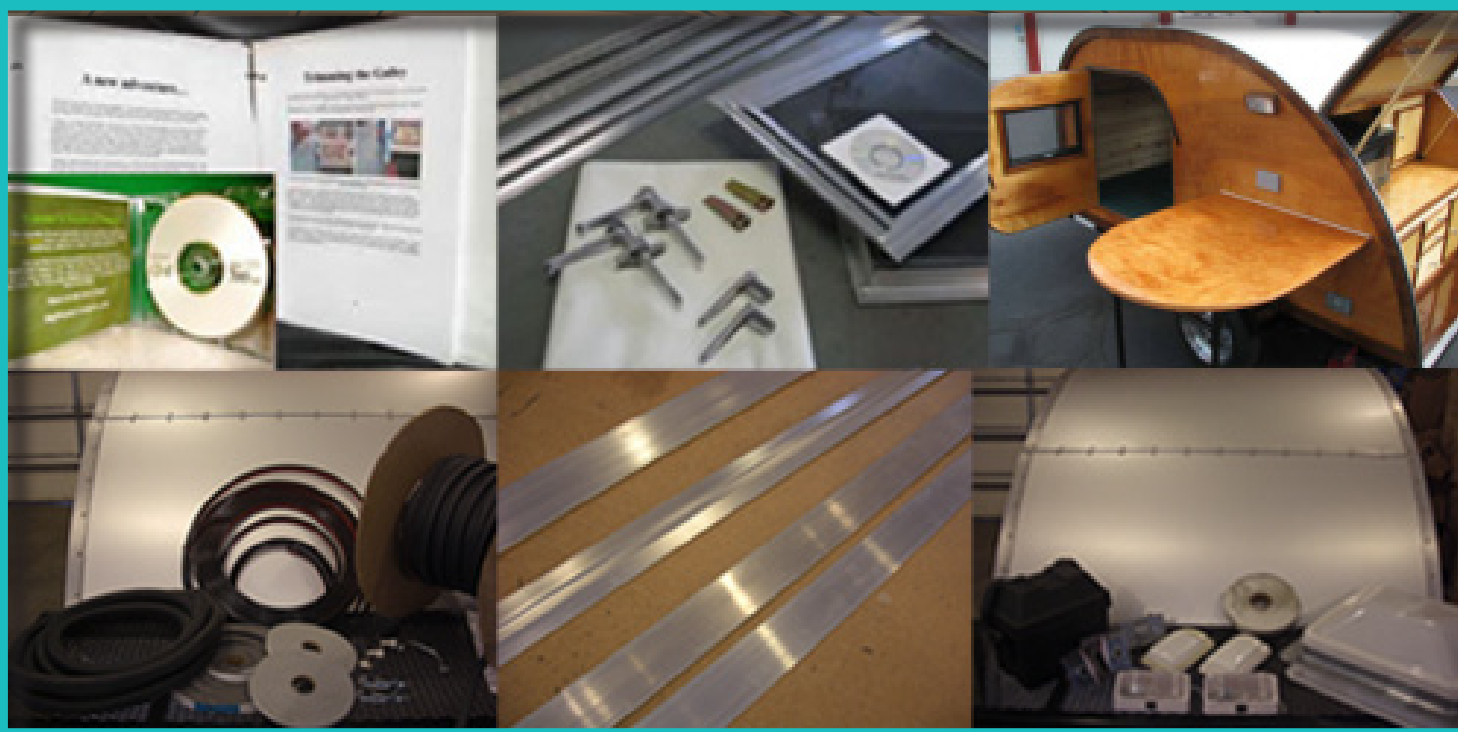
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COOL Tears™ and tiny campers

M A G A Z I N E

Vol. 3 No. 6

November/December 2015

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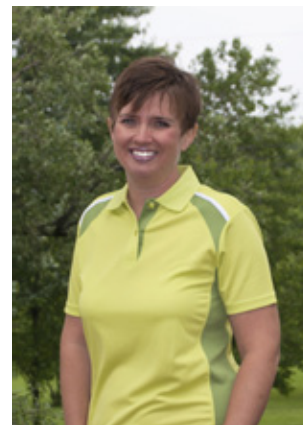
Dennis Caron

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Looking back, looking forward



We are certainly at the point of the calendar year when we begin to look back over the last 12 months and ponder how the year went so quickly. 2015 was no exception in speed but wow, was it a fun one! This adventure of teardrop camper magazine publishing has been such a great growing experience and I have been blessed with many new friendships because of it. From advertisers all across America to feature story authors, it has been a blast talking with teardrop enthusiast and learning so much about this industry.

As I look forward to 2016, I am excited about a few new things in the works for Cool Tears. One of the biggest undertakings will be a calendar of events that we will publish both on the website and in the magazine. Grant Whipp over at Lil' Bear Tag Alongs/teardrop.net has retired and approached me about taking over his calendar of events and so I plan to publish the first list in the Jan/Feb issue. So hit me up if you know of, or are planning any teardrop gatherings! I also plan to attend a few gatherings in 2016 and hope to meet many of our readers.

This issue contains a story that is very special and that we here at Cool Tears spent hours preparing. The teardrop industry lost a passionate, creative and amazing builder this year when Christopher Walker passed away. He left a wonderful legacy and it was our honor to include a short piece on his life and work. May he rest in peace.

As we near the Christmas holiday may you rest in the knowledge and wonder of the Christ child's miraculous birth. From my family to yours, Merry Christmas!

Until next time...enjoy every sunrise!

SARAH TUCKER

Editor

Cool Tears and Tiny Campers Magazine™
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A Year in a Year



by **Tara Marti**

This crazy idea of camping began two years ago when I stumbled upon the blog “Gone with the Wynns” about travel and camping. I was instantly inspired and couldn’t stop reading. That night I told Marcus about the Wynns blog and that I really wanted to buy an RV and take off. I remember his face so clearly, his eyes lit up and I know if there had been an RV for sale that night we would have bought it right then.



We were to be married that fall, and what could be a better honeymoon than to take off for a year in an RV? We spent those first few months of spring looking at different RV's and campers, trying to decide what to buy. One thing led to another and it never happened.

We held onto our dream, and spent a month last year traveling down south over Christmas and New Years. We loved it and knew we had to leave the following winter or we would never fulfill our dream.

So we rented out our house, lived in a travel trailer in our yard, saved as much as we could while waiting for our teardrop camper.

When the RV bug first bit in that small pizza place in the middle of nowhere, we had no idea of what we wanted. We looked at all kinds of RVs from Class A to C, at dealers and on Craigslist. I wanted to be able to make a sandwich or take a nap while we were driving down the road. That idea fell through because of the price tags and the restrictions that come with such a big rig.

Marcus finally convinced me to look at travel trailers. He liked having the ability to unhook the trailer and go, and if the truck broke down it would be a lot easier to fix than an RV. So we began shopping for a camper. Believe me, it's easier said than done. There are so many options: fifth wheel, pop up, one



axel or two, outdoor kitchen, indoor island, and then there are eight companies that make each one but just a little different. After countless visits to RV dealers and two RV shows we were totally confused.

Of course we wanted it all; outdoor kitchen, flat screen, island and full stereo. But is that really camping? No it's glam-ping and the point of our trip was to see the countryside not the inside of a shiny new RV!

So we reassessed. Do we really need a toy hauler to bring along the dirt bike and motorcycle? Do we need a 36 foot camper for the two of us? How much money do we want to spend and how much gas do we want to buy pulling it? Sure, we could buy an old fixer upper and remodel the inside to be all white with barn board flooring and hipster decorations, but is that really necessary? How much time and money are we going to put into this thing? After all we want to go exploring not antiquing.

When our neighbors put the Pilgrim up for sale we knew we had found what we were looking for. It was small,



efficient, no frills and best of all below our price point. We bought it and had the neighbor pull it into the yard because we didn't have a truck big enough to pull it. So now it was truck shopping time. Thankfully, Marcus still had his car dealer license so he went to a few auctions but no luck. Then he packed his bag and drove down to Tennessee and came home with the perfect rust free truck.

We thought we were finally set. We took the rig out for a few trips and found that it's a real experience. The gas mileage was far worse than we thought, and if it is windy it was white knuckle time. Even though the camper is small it is not light, especially once you are living in it and have it weighted down. We knew that it would be far too stressful and exhausting to haul it around for a year, so back to the drawing board we went.

We talked about just packing up the Subaru and taking a tent like we did last winter. That sure got old, packing everything up and unpacking, but it worked. Should we just do the air and hotel or B and B thing? What about a camper van? So we started shopping for vans, especially a sprinter van. Ah, this would be perfect, we thought, except that we couldn't afford it.

Frustration was setting in. We not only did not know what to live in, what to pull it with and what to bring. I have always loved teardrop campers but Marcus always dismissed the idea; he just didn't like them. After showing him countless pictures, he started looking into it and found TC Teardrops, which are made right in Central Wisconsin only a 45 minute drive from us. He went and looked at them and – BAM -- we were done! This was it. We talked a few more

weeks about what model, accessories, and whether to build our own.

We finally put payment down and we couldn't be happier. Now we have our teardrop. To pull it, we recently purchased a Chevy S10 truck from Marcus's grandfather. We sold the Subaru and are going to take the S10, or the quarter ton HD, as Marcus likes to call it.

On Dec. 2 we began our year in a tear. We haven't gone very far yet but we are happy about that, we wanted to learn to slow down and experience everything. The weather has been unseasonably warm which equal happy campers and we have met some amazing people!

[Follow along with us at www.yearinatear.com](http://www.yearinatear.com)





ALASKA

Calling

GETTING
THERE

“You sure are
a long way from
home!”

“We’ve always
dreamed
of driving
the Alaska
Highway.”

“Did you tow
that thing
all the way
from Alaska
to New
Mexico?”

by **Ed Sasser**

An Alaska license plate invites comment. Those of us towing teardrops have the added curiosity that our little trailers spark in passers by. We’ve lost track of the number of impromptu “tours” we’ve given in our first 11,000 miles. Many included questions about the “ultimate” teardrop trip: Alaska.





Folks contemplating travel into Alaska seem to be seeking first-hand knowledge, reassurance as to its actual possibility and, maybe, a little encouragement.

While we may refer to the route as our “commute,” we’ve taken every question quite seriously. Following is a summary of the most frequent fire-side chats Natalie and I have had with fellow teardroppers about traveling north. Photographs are from a June 2015 return home from the “outside” that we made with grandson, Edwin, in our 5 X 10 foot homebuilt, The Coot.

THE FAT GUIDE

My first recommendation to anyone contemplating a run north is to pick up the latest edition of the Milepost: a fat, mile-by-mile (km by km) guide from several lower 48 ports of entry to multiple

Alaska destinations. Every named highway in Alaska, British Columbia and the Yukon is detailed along with Alaska Marine Highway information and route-planning ideas. No campfire conversation will replace having a copy of this book on the dashboard.

ALASKA OR CASSIAR?

Since our most recent trip originated in Las Vegas and ended in Skagway, the Alaska Highway was the most practical for us. As the return would take us through Seattle, the Cassiar would be about 200 miles shorter.

Choice of route depends on personal preferences built around history, infrastructure, the time allotted and other factors. Obviously, if you are a student of the WW II operating engineers who braved the fierce northern environment to link Alaska to the outside, you may elect the Alaska Highway. I’ve included a short bibliography to give you a head start. If, on the other hand, you want to stay west of the continental divide or experience a quaint little coastal village like Hyder, Alaska, the Cassiar may be better for you.

Some folks elect to ride the Alaska Marine Highway one or both ways. (See Cooltears April 2013 for a description of ferrying both north and south). We frequently ride the “Blue Canoe” as the system vessels are affectionately known. They are especially helpful when we want to go south in the winter and camping the Highways would be impractical. On these seasonal runs the driver has traditionally gone free with purchase of a vehicle ticket.

PACE AND TIMING

Whatever time you have allotted as realistic, it’s usually pretty safe to

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double it and add some. Unless you are just delivering a trailer to Alaska, you will find yourself craving lay-over days in multiple spots. This might include hot springs, river crossings, or historic lodges with WiFi and home-made pie. Toad River, as an example, is one of my favorites. You may also find yourself captivated, or held captive by animals on the roadway, stunning vistas, construction or forest fires.

For these and many other reasons, it would be rare for us to pre-book campsites. If the highway starts looking full, we stop early and claim a spot.

Depending on which approach you utilize to get to “mile zero” at Dawson Creek, you may prefer varying the pace. For instance, crossing Saskatchewan may average more miles per day than the Ice Field’s Highway with its many photo ops and camping sites.

As far as time of year, we often depart Alaska in late September/early October. We carry traction devices and usually hit snow at some point. The same is true for April-May returns. Fair weather travel might include a piece of mosquito netting big enough to cover your entire vehicle or the galley area of the ‘drop. Winter would be insane. I’ve driven chunks of it, but I was on a payroll.

CANADIAN CUSTOMS

This is an entire treatise on its own and I won’t play the authority. Make sure you consider your cell phone charges, ID issues, permission letters for grandchildren, credit card notifications, firearms, insurance and medical needs. I like to carry massive amounts of cash but not over \$10,000 per person; I don’t want the additional declaration paperwork at the borders. Depending on your route, you could have multiple crossings, especially if you take side trips into Hyder or Skagway.

ROAD CONDITIONS

This is a classic “Blue Highway” tour with no freeway option. Conditions are variable depending on the highway. Map legends clearly outline surface materials and are mostly accurate. Construction delays are always possible and the average speed indicated on GPS mapping systems is purely a mathematical function.

Frost heaves are indicated with little red or orange flags next to the highway. Slow down ahead of time for these unless you want to snap a picture of the daylight under your trailer tires in the rear-view mirror. This is where you will be happy to have a single axle versus a triple-axle fifth wheel. Almost all of the primary





highways are paved, but center and fog lines shouldn't be expected. I don't run at night except for emergencies or when somebody pays me. If you plan to, get moose lights.

FUEL

Top off frequently and carry a jerry. Know your vehicle range and have an advance idea of the next few fuel stops. Check the mileposts for hours of operation and possible closures. Don't assume. The last time I went through Border Town it closed at something like 7 p.m. and didn't take credit cards. The gamble to make Northway and an all-night self-serve paid off, but reminded me why I had a list of personal fuel rules. Things change between trips. Resolve doubt in your favor.

To calculate current U.S. per gallon price from Canadian price per liter, multiply per liter price



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(Canadian) by 3.785 and divide by current exchange rate (U.S. to Canadian). Highest price I've run into on the past few trips is \$7.20 a gallon at Muncho Lake. I pat myself on the back for storing the motor home in Las Vegas.

MINDFUL TRAVEL

What Captain Obvious may be missing when he tells us we're a long way from home is our belief that the teardrop lifestyle allows us to feel as if we ARE home.

For best results, consider adopting an aphorism or theme for your trip. It's going to be a long one. It's going to be epic.

Remember to slow down, de-stress, be in the moment and remind yourself that it's not worth sweating the small stuff and it's all small stuff? This is the journey of a lifetime with people you love. Be there!

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Teardrop Legacy



CHRISTOPHER EUGENE WALKER

1967 - 2015



by Sarah Tucker

Christopher Walker was a unique individual with a creative mind; a restorer of stained glass, old cars and old houses. But his passion was designing and building teardrop campers.

His active life ended at age 48 when Parkinson's disease finally defeated him. Tiring of the never-ending pain that wracked his body, he took his life on September 25 in the town he loved, Hemet, Calif., leaving behind a teenaged son and longtime partner, Amy Murray.

I had planned to do a feature on Christopher after he sent information and photos of his teardrop builds, which I genuinely loved. Upon hearing of his death, I decided to do this as a tribute to his life and love of building teardrops and teardrop camping.

He got hooked on teardrops after negotiating the purchase of a 1930s Spanish Revival bungalow near downtown Hemet in 2012. The owner urged him to "join the teardrop movement" and made the suggestion a part of the purchase terms.

"Our neighbors, strangely enough, were also intrigued with the teardrop trailers," he wrote. "My initiation was a teardrop gathering about 30 minutes away in the San Jacinto Mountains. It was love at first sight. Not the trailers; the people."



He and his neighbor scoured a swap meet at Pomona Fairgrounds and found a set of '36 Packard limousine fenders, one with a spare tire well intact. He bought them on the spot and the first build was on.

With his son, Matti, the furniture was removed from the dining room and rosin paper was placed over the floor. There the profile design was done. "We used string, pots, pans and many a pencil and pen to get the dimensions just right," he wrote. "It took us a few days to settle on a template that was just right for us."

They searched eBay and Amazon for bits and pieces and found an older off road motorcycle frame on Craigslist. The idea started to become reality.

"It took us nearly a year, hundreds of hours of labor and nearly \$10,000 to complete, but she was ours," Walker wrote. "An original."

That original teardrop is now owned by one of California's most celebrated artists, Eric M. Davis. He is a watercolor artist currently doing a series of watercolors celebrating California's piers.



He was chosen from a list of people who wanted to buy it.

Not long after the first teardrop was finished a friend suggested another made from old barn wood. They put word out on Facebook for old barn board and




corrugated tin and the next day had all they needed and the build was on. The “barn” trailer was sold to fund another historic home renovation.

With that one sold, they decided to build another one to keep; a teardrop to match a 1953 Fleetwood “canned ham” that was a gift from Bob and Cindy Ross, the West Coast’s preeminent trailer restorers.

More teardrop designs were in the thought process, but now are gone.

“Building is the best part to me; the outings a close second,” he wrote. “The PEOPLE are what make this the best experience anyone could ever have.”

His partner, Amy Murray, sent along her



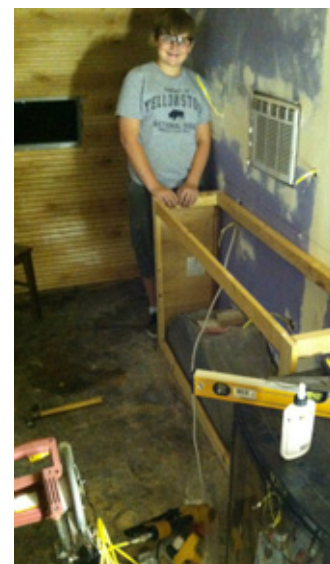
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rarely would he take even ibuprofen for the pain that his body was in 24-hours a day. Obviously, not only his physical pain, but the effects of Parkinson's were becoming more dominant, mentally. He knew it.


"It just doesn't make sense ... but then again it does. He was tired, he was in pain, lots of pain, and probably just felt he couldn't do it anymore."

personal eulogy, remembering Christopher as a "powerful presence" in his community. He was a real estate broker and had served on the governing board, wanting to make the community better.

"A few years back, things started changing in him. Although he loved Hemet and wanted better for it, he stepped aside, he 'relaxed,'" she wrote. "He found peace, a new thing that he loved, and that was creating and building teardrop campers. And the most amazing ones at that.

"Although he loved to create and build those teardrop trailers, loved to go camping and make plans with our neighbors, Russ and Amber, he was also, physically and mentally, fighting something that he knew was getting worse -- Parkinson's disease. He refused any and all treatment, and






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from dream to
Dreamdrop



by **Barry Higgins**

As an avid camper, I wanted an easier way to enjoy camping; a way to avoid the hassle of finding a campsite, putting up the tent and setting up camp, rain or shine. A teardrop trailer made sense, so I set out to build my own. I wanted a trailer with all the amenities that would fit on a tiny frame and could be pulled with almost any vehicle.

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I started with a 5 X 10 foot utility trailer because I wanted extra platform room up front for a utility box to hold the generator, battery and storage. That left the tongue space for the spare tire. I cut off all the railing and tailgate. I left

the pressure-treated floor and placed half-inch treated plywood over it. I purchased everything I wanted in the galley and then started designing the trailer on graph paper from the galley forward. I wanted to make sure everything in the galley -- microwave, cooler, sink and stove -- would fit the limited space.

I designed an 8 ½ foot long cabin to allow more room in the galley; a cabin area large enough for a full-size Spa-Sensations memory-foam mattress. That left 18 inches on the front for the utility box. Construction was done in a storage unit just large enough to hold the trailer and the only tools I had available were a jig-saw, router, drill, palm sander and back-saw with a miter box. The limitations made it a real challenge.

The exterior walls are half-inch Birch plywood. I stained the exterior with cherry stain and sealed it with two thin coats of clear epoxy. I added three coats of Spar varnish over the epoxy for added UV protection. I used a combination of 2 X 4s and 2 X 2s for the studs in the walls. Solid 2 X 2 oak pieces were attached at the bottom of the walls to add strength for

bolting onto the trailer base. I then installed all of the wiring for the AC and DC components through the walls, then installed the roof rafters making sure the roof opening would accommodate the ventilation fan. I installed the interior ceiling panel and lights then installed half-inch foam board insulation in the walls and ceiling on top. Birch bead board was installed on the interior walls.



The next challenge was the galley. Half-inch Birch plywood was used for the counter-top and the sides for the cooler compartment below. A 12-inch stainless steel salad bowl serves as a sink. The counter top was covered with a thin layer of clear epoxy for durability and it turned out great. The separation





walls were installed for the rest of the galley working from bottom to top. Ball-bearing slide rails were used for the cooler and stove slide-out drawers. Cedar trim was placed around all openings in the galley and doors and drawers were added. I brushed on three coats of Spar varnish on all the wood surfaces for protection and beauty.

I installed a 2 X 2 inch solid oak spar at the hinge points at the roof and on the galley door for strength. I used heavier material so the roof would withstand hail storms and debris falling on it. Thick fiberglass

sheeting was covered with brown vinyl, using 3M spray adhesive. The sheets were secured to the roof with one-inch wide aluminum strips and stainless steel screws. I then installed the roof vent and installed the 12 X 18 inch windows in the left side and door.

The exterior trim was installed on the sides using thin cedar boards, attaching it with Liquid Nails adhesive for a nice smooth look. I applied three coats of Spar varnish to the cedar trim, always sanding in between coats.





The hard work came next. Using only a jig-saw, I started cutting ribs for the galley door. I cut eight ribs from three-quarter-inch oak plywood and five more from solid pine. I wanted solid wood ribs for strength, having seen people break doors with just plywood ribs. I glued two solid pine ribs with one oak plywood rib on both outer ribs, two three-quarter-inch oak

plywood ribs for the left and right intermediate ribs and one solid pine and two oak plywood ribs for the center. I assembled all the ribs to the solid oak boards at the top and bottom of the door assembly. I used a 60-inch piano hinge for the galley door. Using a long straight-edge, I sanded the ribs down level with the outer body edges so the roof would seal on the body sides.

Birch bead board was used on the interior of the galley door. I installed the galley light and paper towel holder and the rear locking handle. The galley roof was done the same as the cabin roof using the fiber glass sheeting and vinyl.

Appliances were placed in the galley and interior cabin; a cooler for food, Coleman stove for cooking, water jugs for the sink and all the eating utensils and dishes.

In the cabin, for entertainment, I installed a 22-inch flat screen HD television along with a Samsung Blu-Ray player and stereo system pushing out the sound from Kenwood speakers in the galley area and Klipsch speakers in the cabin. I built a headboard with the left-over vinyl.

Finishing up, I installed the cabin door and built the utility storage on the front. The storage unit has three compartments holding a 1500-watt generator, the battery and RV power station to charge the battery and operate the electricity when connected to AC power and, when needed, the solar control panel to charge the battery from the solar panel I installed on the top of the storage compartment. The rest is for storage. The spare tire is mounted on the trailer tongue.



I have taken the trailer camping several times to the lake this past year and also two trips to the NASCAR races in Bristol, Tenn., and the trailer did not disappoint.

It was quite a feat to build the trailer with limited tools and tight space, but it was enjoyable to see my dream come to life. The trailer is very functional and I would take it over a full size trailer any time. It saves money on gas and can be pulled by almost any vehicle.



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HOW DID HIGH CAMP TRAILERS GET STARTED!?

High Camp Trailers began selling teardrop trailers in earnest mid-2014 after about 2 years of work on the design and construction process. I built my first teardrop trailer in 2007 and became somewhat obsessed with building teardrop trailers that had the fit and finish of, say, a classic yacht or vintage trailer. Prior to that, my wife and I had taken a 3 month long road trip traveling across the United States by car to see the National Parks and camp and hike, often tent camping in difficult weather.

After moving to Portland, Oregon in the beautiful Pacific Northwest and with our car camping experiences from that trip fresh in my mind, I discovered teardrop trailers and instantly recognized their brilliance - fully equipped with all the essentials, stripped of the non

essentials, comfortable, compact and stylish. At the time there were only a few high quality builders who had gone beyond the traditional boxy Benroy-style teardrop design, but I felt that even these builders had left much to be desired in terms of fit, finish and functionality. Even these high-end trailers showed unfinished plywood edges, hardware and appliance choices dictated by the RV products industry, and shortcomings in either their cabin or galley designs that compromised the trailer's overall utility. I took it as a challenge to bridge these gaps and improve on the traditional teardrop design.

WHAT ARE YOUR MOST POPULAR MODELS?

We currently have a single 5' x 8' model called the Classic that features a rich, warm birchwood interior, queen size firm foam mattress, and right-sized storage in the cabin, emphasizing openness in the cabin over large cabinets which quickly cramp the sleeping space. The galley features a high output 3-burner stainless steel cooktop with custom wood cover and a Coleman stainless steel 54 quart cooler, both installed on heavy duty drawer slides that bring those appliances out to the user and then tuck back away to stow. The galley sports the same beautiful birchwood and aluminum tones as the cabin and also strikes the right balance between storage capacity and open space.

WHAT ARE YOUR MOST POPULAR OPTIONS OR ACCESSORIES?

We take a decidedly different approach to options and accessories than most other teardrop manufacturers. We believe that a well equipped teardrop trailer for any of our customers should come standard with all the things that we ourselves expect in a teardrop trailer. Things like electric drum brakes on the axle (torsion of course), powder coated fenders, 7-pin trailer plugs and wiring, high capacity on board deep cycle battery and 3-stage charger, backup lights, chrome rims, cooler,

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stove and more. We even purge and fill the customer's propane tank for them at pickup. We want the buying process to be an easy and pain free one without the customer having to wade through a list of 50+ accessories/options and make a buying decision over and over for each. That said, there are some really nice options that we offer separate from the trailer including a propane on-demand hot water heater, stand-alone shower tent, solar charging panels (detached), rear bicycle rack receiver, and digital battery monitor. We believe that these options are more dictated by the customers expected length of camping trips and whether they tend to camp in designated campgrounds, or more off the grid.

WHAT DO YOU THINK SETS YOUR TRAILERS APART FORM OTHERS?

I want people to be as impressed with the fit and finish of a High Camp Classic teardrop trailer as they are when stepping into a luxury car. You won't find exposed plywood edges in our teardrop trailers, no vinyl flooring, no



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In fact, we stay miles away
from any components from

the RV world choosing rather to equip our teardrop trailers with parts from the marine market. We also truly believe that style counts to our customers and that every design aspect of our trailer must serve both the functionality of the trailer, as well as the overall appeal of the trailer. We don't sacrifice one for the other simply because a part or process is cheaper, faster, or simply looks better. I believe that those painstaking decisions have resulted in a teardrop trailer that looks, feels and functions as brilliantly as the original teardrop trailer concept conceived.

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Anyone interested can find more about our teardrop trailers at www.highcamptrailers.com, or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/highcamptrailers.com. Call us at (503) 869-9825, or email us at Dennis@HighCampTrailers.com.



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