

MIDWEST TEARDROP MANUFACTURE FEATURE

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April 2018

COOL Tears™

and tiny campers

Poetic Beauty



ON THE ROAD WITH COOL TEARS

to the 4th Annual Gathering of the Southwest Teardrops & Vintage Trailers



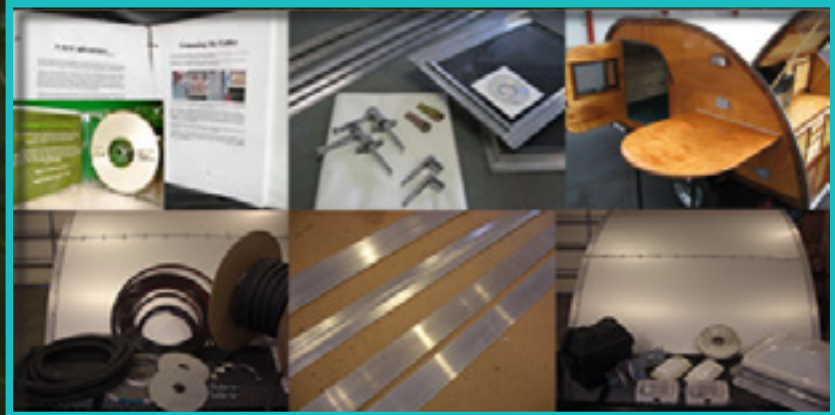
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Magazine

Vol. 6 No. 4

April 2018

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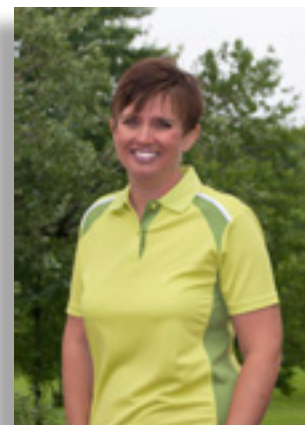
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Letter from the Editor:

Spring Adventures

Spring has arrived! What an amazing Spring Break we enjoyed as a family down in Texas for the 4th Annual Gathering of the Southwest Teardrop and Vintage Trailer group. You can read all about our trip on page 28 although one little detail I did not share in the story is that I broke my foot on the trip. One would think I would at least have some great story because we were camping when it broke but in all honesty, I stepped wrong off a curb at a McDonald's and rolled my toes under the foot, fracturing the 5th metatarsal bone and landing myself in a boot for at least six weeks. Good times. The time off my feet has got me rethinking a few things on my teardrop and I'm planning some upgrades soon.



This past week, I met with a few different folks and have some great changes in the future for Cool Tears. In the ever-changing digital world, it is time to upgrade the website and hopefully add a new app soon. If all goes well, we will be able to offer a print subscription by 2019 as well...be watching for details on how you can be a CHARTER print subscriber!

One of my very favorite things about camping is no secret...it's the nightly campfire. The Texas gathering provided only a couple opportunities for a fire as our campsite was in the direct line of what felt like gail-force winds. But one evening we did enjoy toast marshmallow cream strawberries. Haven't tried this delicacy? It's very simple...take fresh strawberries, dip them in marshmallow cream and light toast them over the fire. The strawberry will stay slightly cool but the hit of heat will increase the juicy-ness (yes, I might have made up that word.) Give it a try at your next campfire and be sure to let me know what you think!



Until next time...enjoy every sunrise!

SARAH TUCKER

Editor

Cool Tears Magazine™

sarah@cooltears.com

Notes from folks:

Dear Patrick (Note from March 2018),

Seriously consider crossing the border to Waterton Lakes National Park in Canada. It is really part of Glacier. You will need to get passports or passport cards but otherwise the border crossing is easy. For Canadian money, use a credit card that doesn't charge foreign currency fees, get Canadian cash from an ATM there, or offer US cash as most border businesses are happy to convert it. Although Waterton is popular and you will probably need camping reservations, it is a lot less crowded than the popular US national parks. Also, from Waterton there is a cross-border boat trip that can be taken round trip as a tour, or two one-ways and get off for a day hike in a remote area of Glacier. The Kenow forest fire last fall burned part of Waterton including some facilities, so be sure to check their website for up-to-date info. Fill up with US gas, it is heavily taxed in Canada!

One "downside" of visiting a Canadian NP is you'll want to go back up, it is more like going to our national parks 50 years ago before they got so crowded.

In Glacier, I keep running into people afraid of driving the Going-To-The-Sun-Road. Don't be. The road is generally in superb condition. It is fine for towing a teardrop although parking at viewpoints may be difficult. If the park is crowded when you are there, take the free shuttle for the major viewpoints then drive across the park separately. This road is one of the true beauties of the country.

Sincerely, Alice, Oroville, CA

(Recently upgraded to a teardrop from car camping)

Patrick



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ON THE TEARDROP TRAIL WITH MARILYN

Marilyn McCray is a published author of a cookbook titled *Canning, Pickling and Freezing with Irma Harding*, the International Harvester's fictional spokesperson. Marilyn and her partner, Jim Kerkhoff, travel in a beautiful teardrop to promote the book and she has graciously agreed to share some recipes with us in a regular column. Be sure to check out her book at teardroptrail.com/equipment-and-supplies/

TEARDROP VEGGIE SOUP

Many families have traditional vegetable soup recipes. Here is an option to invent your new vegetable soup. We enjoy using a slow cooker for days when we are in camp but have a busy day. Prepared the soup, start the slow cooker and arrive to an amazing soup for dinner.

Serves 8

This recipe can be made in a large stock pot or a slow cooker.

- Medium onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced (Add more to suit your taste)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 15 once can diced or fire roasted tomatoes
- 4 cups of stock – vegetable broth or chicken stock
- 1 cup water
- 1 tablespoon oregano
- 1 tablespoon parsley
- Salt and pepper to taste

Use 8 cups of sliced or chopped vegetables of your choice

- Celery, sliced
- 2 -3 Carrots – Consider using a white or purple carrots in addition to the orange
- Zucchini
- Fresh green beans



- 2 Leeks, sliced use only the white and light green parts
- Corn, frozen or canned

Options:

Use frozen mixed veggies
15 once canned white or cannellini beans

Cooking Methods:

Large Stock Pot –

Heat the olive oil in stock

pot to medium. Add onion, leeks, garlic, celery, carrots, herbs stir. Reduce heat, add tomatoes and broth cover and cook for 20 minutes

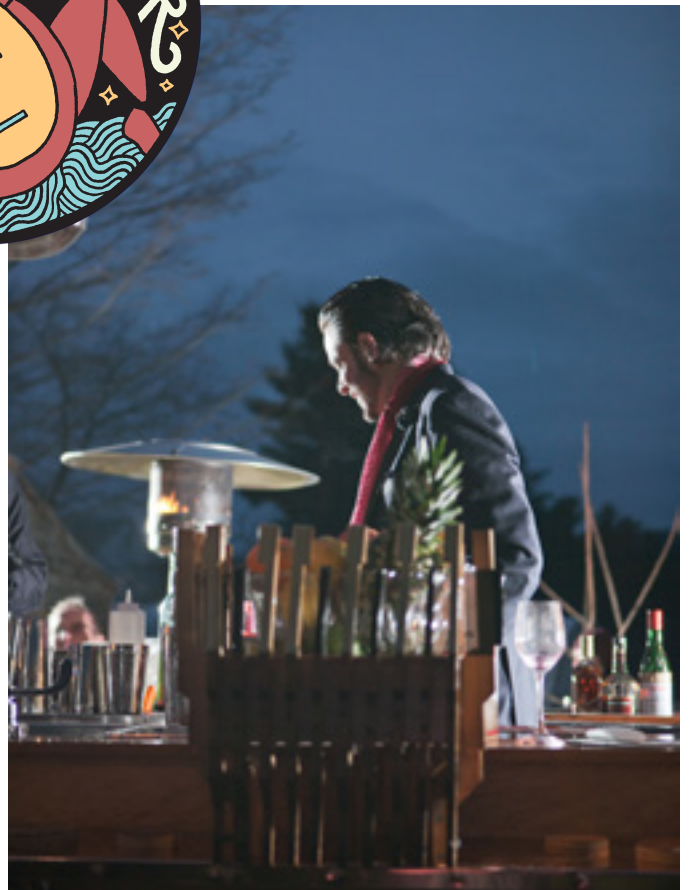
Slow Cooker (6 Quart)–

Heat the olive oil in skillet to medium. Add onion, leeks, garlic, celery, carrots

Transfer to slow cooker, add tomatoes and broth cover and cook on high for 4 hours or low for 6 hours.

Garnish with fresh chopped parsley

Poetic Beauty



By Ignacio Oreamuno

The Troubardour is a hand-made piece of art that was forged from wood and metal by inspired craft artisans. The design inspiration of the Troubardour was the classic guitar, an instrument that produces beautiful music but which also begs to be touched. The Troubardour was created to inspire and awaken. This one of a kind creation was the dream of owner, Ignacio Oreamuno and was brought to life by New England Concession Trailers.



The most astonishing thing about building the Troubardour is that it went from an idea in my head to a reality in less than 11 months. Making it was one of the most insane undertakings any of us had ever done. Like Mark Ketchum Jr, the owner of New England Concession Trailers said when we were building, "What I love about it... is that it's that on one else is going to do anything quite like it, I hope, because if they do they are crazy."

Mark was right. Troubardour was a project of blood, sweat and tears. There was nothing logical about it. From day one, we set out to create not just a bar-trailer but a piece of art.

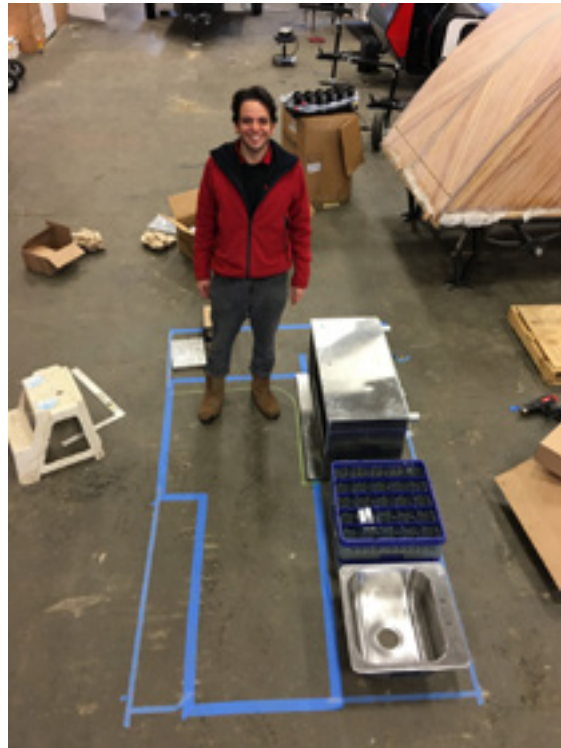
In total, it took about 11 months to build the bar. Since

NE Concession Trailers worked on many custom trailers at the shop, we had to work in stages. Sometimes there was one person working on the Troubardour and sometimes we were three of us. Every day for six months I commuted three hours

to Hampstead, NH from my house so I could help out in the building of my bar. I've never been a builder of any kind so I was in unknown territory, but I managed to learn and help as much as I could in everything from welding to wood-working.

The project in New England was led by Mark who is a master builder and previously owned a construction company. His love of craft and wood working was evident as we progressed through the project. Making





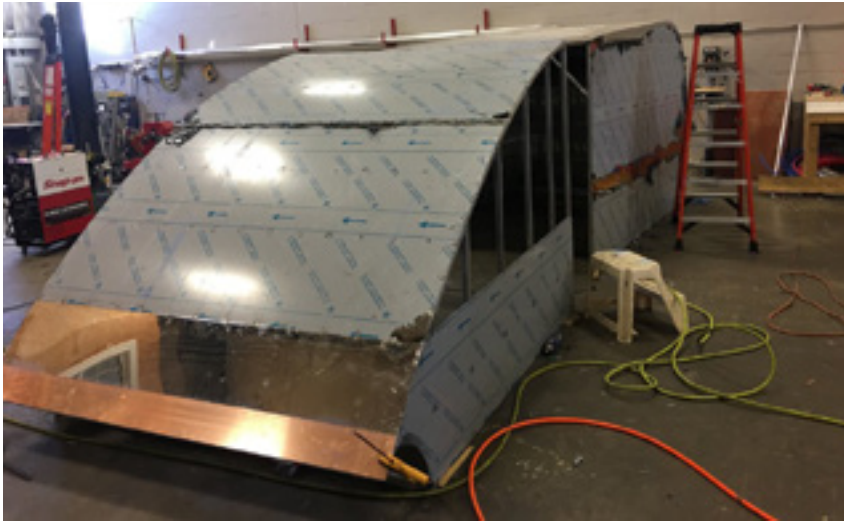
the most insane trailer bar there ever was became Mark's passion and eventually led him to shifting the company's focus from traditional camping teardrops to concession trailers for people that were interested in going into the food truck and mobile catering business.

We didn't really have a plan but instead we had ideas and sketches. Architecting and engineering was entirely improvised and everything from the shape, to the size, to the functionality of the bar changed each day and every hour.

I don't think it's correct to say that we built the bar, instead, I think the bar built itself. Mark and I felt a strange extra sensorial connection

every time we had to make a critical design decision of the bar. We would get a queasy nausea feeling in our guts if we were discussing how the bar would close or how a metal would curve, and until we made the right decision to move forward, it wouldn't go away. It's like the bar was telling us which way to shape it and how.





hurting people made us tone it back, eventually leading us to the awesome idea of cutting the shell of the trailer in two pieces and just putting it on and off like a hat and leaving the bar on the actual frame. We estimate the Troubardour weighs about 2.5 tons.

Essentially, we built three separate pieces. The first one was the bar itself which was built on a steel frame. The second one is the frame which was built by J&J Trailers in New Hampshire, and the third one is the trailer shell. We literally built a transformer and put it together the last week.

Art

Troubardour is a piece of art and we built it like artists. The front of the bar is made from my the 80 year old mahogany wood of grandmother's piano...her inheritance to me. We took it apart and used it to create the platform at the front of the bar where the cocktails go. We then used the piano keys to create the fruit basket

All we knew from the beginning was that the bar was going to be big and that we wanted it to be entirely self-sufficient with water tanks and independent power. It had to be big enough for two bartenders so I could service big events. How the bar would come out of the trailer, well that went through many different ideas. Originally we were going to have the bar slide out of the trailer but that became impossible once the massive weight of the bar brought us into reality. We then went a little nuts and decided that the entire shell was going to lift up like a transformer, but then the reality of strong winds blowing it off and





for the front of the bar, which is one of the most visually arresting parts of the bar.



Because Troubardour is a mobile cocktail bar it meant that our patron would have one night only with the bar, and to make that experience memorable we have several



design easter eggs built around the bar. Small details that if you touch and find them will make you quickly understand the amount of thought and love that went into the building of the bar.

The artistic beauty bar has a purpose, and that is to inspire the senses and make a party with the Troubardour a night you'll always remember.



The Shell

The outer shell of the trailer is the piece du resistance. On a hot summer day Mark used a manual metal bender to shape the aluminum beams that would give the Troubardour its unique sleek shape. The entire outside was not just hand-made but improvised. All the curves had to match on both sides and we literally had to try and try until we got it right. Guesswork, patience and a lot of artistic freedom were involved.

It took a long time to weld the entire structure and then we proceeded to use rivets to add the stainless steel sheets that add the incredible mirrored look to the trailer. The metal looks amazing but was extremely hard to work with and made us pay a big price in patience, blood and sweat.

The shell is split into two parts, the amphitheater and the night club. Engineering a way to keep the

shell hat on top of the trailer as well as making it waterproof was no easy task and required us to wear our innovation and improvisation hats. We used everything from clamps to electro-magnets to find ways of keeping the trailer secure when traveling.

The Tech

Troubardour is like a small house. It's got a 40 gallon fresh water tank, grey water tank, pump, water heater, two sinks, a bar gun, a complete DJ, TV, music, karaoke, record player, microphone, photo booth, and light system.

Putting everything together was no easy task and involved some seriously clever electric and plumbing work. A lot of care had to be used when laying down all the piping and electric to make sure it would be accessible for maintenance, water-proof in case it rains, as well as hidden from public view.

Blood, Sweat & Tears

I am 100% sure that if given the option to do it again, none of us would do it. Building this bar was like giving birth to a 200 pound baby. It's probably going to be the craziest thing all of us have ever done. So much love and care have gone into every single corner of the bar. Every nail had a conversation, every inch was measured, every thing that could be polished, waxed or treated was done so multiple times, every flaw we found was meticulously fixed. Anyone that orders a cocktail in this bar and touches it is going to immediately feel all the love that we poured into it.

The Troubardour was finished on the dawn of December 2 and a few hours later at 3pm, I had it set up for the first party. The Troubardour World Premiere took place at the Hancock Inn in New Hampshire which is the oldest inn and bar in New Hampshire. This Hancock Inn was open when President George Washington was inaugurated and now I was opening up my dream trailer cocktail bar in



it. It all felt pretty historic to me. We placed the trailer outside on the cricket field and setup the mini-nightclub and the amphitheater in a way that it created a mini-village of happiness. It was magical, with bonfires, live music and lots of lights! Even though I had not slept in 24 hours it all just flowed and everyone that came that day was in shock, including me. It was a very special night, after all - what's not to love about fresh cocktails from a freshly made bar!



TEARDROP TIPS



HITCHING TIPS

One of the great luxuries of a teardrop camper is the ability to easily move it around by hand. When backing up to your teardrop trailer, to hitch it up, close may be close enough. You don't have to get the ball positioned perfectly under the hitch like you would with larger trailers.

1. If you are physically able, move the camper the last inch by hand to line up with the ball when connecting. This saves dents in the tow vehicle's back bumper and paint getting knocked off the hitch of the camper.'

2. When the hitch is fully coupled to the ball you should have about the width of your thumb between the hitch coupler and the ball mount.

3. If the gap is significantly more than the width of your thumb, then the coupler could be jammed up on top of the ball and not properly connected.

4. Safety chains must cross each other and connect to the ring on the tow vehicle's hitch receiver on the opposite side.

5. In the event of the trailer becoming unhitched while driving, the crossed chains will pull tight against the weight of the trailer and form a supporting bridge that will hold up the tongue and prevent it from digging into the road surface.

6. If the chains are not crossed, the tongue of the trailer could simply fall down between the two tensioned chains and impact the road surface.

7. The trailer coupler should be "safety pinned" in the closed position. There is a hole in the latch for a safety pin. It is recommended that you use a padlock, as the pin, to prevent tampering or theft.

8. You can also get receiver-hitch pins with a key lock. This is recommended to help prevent tampering.

9. The majority of theft attempts will be deterred by a padlock. Those who are not deterred by locks are serious criminals and are much harder to deter.

10. Never use a 1-7/8" ball with the coupler made for 2". It may seem like a small difference but the trailer may come unhitched if you hit a big bump.

**HITCHING TIPS (GUIDING)
Coming next month**

***A special thank you to Craig Edevold
with Camp Inn Trailers for these tips.***

Watch monthly for more great camping helps!

www.tinycamper.com

TOWING

a Tiny Trailer



Two wheel vs All wheel vs four wheel

By Sarah Tucker

Editor's Note: This month, I had to replace my tow vehicle (read: engine leaking and transmission about to do something scary) and in the process learned a lot about tow vehicles. As I began searching, I quickly realized the vast amount of information needed to purchase a new tow vehicle. This will be the first in a series of articles all pertaining to tow vehicles and choosing the perfect one for your needs. Now don't get me wrong, I am not about to tell anyone what they should or should not drive to tow a teardrop or tiny camper. That's not my job. I am only going to pass along what I learned because I found it all very interesting.

What is the difference in 2WD, AWD and 4WD vehicles when it comes to towing a camper?

Two-wheel drive

When it comes to towing with a standard two-wheel drive vehicle, you need to be mindful of staying well within its towing capacity. This can be quite limiting with caravans and boats, and can restrict how fully you can load a trailer, so you need to be constantly aware of the weight limits. Having the rear end sag due to excessive weight or uneven weight distribution is dangerous and can cause instability.

Other things to consider when towing with a two-wheel drive:

Take care when towing in the wet or on other slippery or uneven surfaces, as traction of towing vehicles can be an issue.

Rear-wheel drive cars are widely considered the best two-wheel drive option for towing, as front-wheel drives tend to be more sensitive to weight distribution.

Testing has shown that two-wheel drives are more fuel efficient, even when towing, than four-wheel drive vehicles.

All-wheel drive

Usually found in a sport utility vehicle (SUV) style car, the all-wheel drive is a modern vehicle that is a lighter weight alternative to a four-wheel drive. It also gains more traction than a two-wheel drive. If you're thinking of towing with an all-wheel drive, consider the following:

Remember that an all-wheel drive isn't equivalent to a four-wheel drive. You can't take it on the same tracks or expect the same performance, simply because it doesn't have the same ground clearance (in most instances) or low range.

Expect the fuel economy to be somewhere in the middle of a two-wheel drive and a four-wheel drive, even when towing.

Four-wheel drive

There are two instances in which a four-wheel drive vehicle is necessary or preferable for towing. The first is obvious: when you're looking to head off-road and into the bush, you'll need the capabilities and ground clearance of a four-wheel drive. Secondly, if you're towing a boat trailer a four-wheel drive is preferable, especially on the boat ramp.

Consider the following when towing with a four-wheel drive:

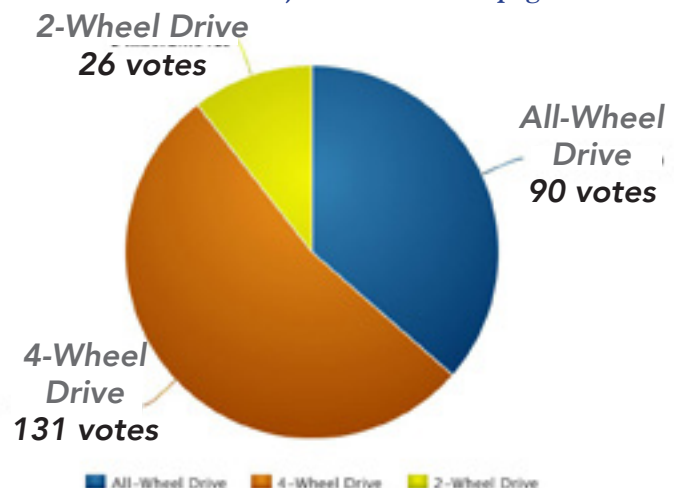
Ensure that your trailer has the same capabilities as your vehicle. Look at the ground clearance first – the trailer or camper needs to be at the same height as the vehicle for both clearance and stability purposes. Next, do your research on trailer tyres and the durability of the trailer's materials.

Boat ramps can be slippery and sandy, and hard to gain traction on, so many boat owners opt to tow with a four-wheel drive. Using low range on the boat ramp can save your clutch, transmission and drive train.

Most importantly, always check your vehicle's towing capacity with the manufacturer and ensure you're driving safely, no matter what the vehicle is.

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By **Bill Gee**

My tow vehicle is a 2013 Nissan Frontier Pro4x. I have been very pleased with it over 70,000 miles of driving and about 30,000 miles of towing my camper.



My previous tow vehicle was a 2003 Chevrolet S-10 with the ZR-2 package. The article you recently reran about my Campfire camper has a picture of this truck with the camper in a creek bed. The S-10 was a good design but poorly executed. After 10 years I had 186,000 miles on it and could see maintenance work coming up that would cost more than the truck was worth. In addition, it did not get good fuel economy and was a bit short of power. Over its life I spent almost as much on maintenance and repairs as I did to buy it.

The criteria for a new vehicle came down to this:

1) I can only own one vehicle. Whatever I own has to be suitable for everything. I live alone and almost never carry more than one passenger, so seating capacity is not important.

2) It has to have a towing capacity over 4000 pounds. Preferably over 5000. My camper weighs about 2000 pounds dry and around 2500 loaded for the road. A tow rating over 4000 gives me some leeway.

3) Body on frame. I like to have structural steel connecting the engine, drivetrain and trailer hitch. Wrinkled sheet metal (also called unit-body) vehicles are amazing strong - until you get one small dent. Then the whole thing collapses like a house of cards.

4) Pickup bed. This gives me a place to change in and out of muddy caving gear, and a place to carry that muddy caving gear. A pickup bed can be hosed out, unlike the back of an SUV.

5) Off-road 4x4 package. Caves are never next to the Walmart parking lot. Many caves I go to are two or three miles down an ATV trail. I need a vehicle that can navigate such a trail.

6) More power and torque than the S-10. Better fuel economy than the S-10. In early 2013 there were only a few vehicles that met this criteria. I tried to get test drives in the full-size pickups, but no dealer stocks anything that is not loaded to the gills and far larger than I need. The only mid-size pickups on the market at that time were the Nissan Frontier and Toyota



Tacoma.

At that time both pickups were fairly old designs. The decision really came down to this: The Nissan has a more powerful engine (by 40 horsepower and 30 lb-ft torque) and was \$8000 less expensive.

Since then Toyota has come out with a completely new Tacoma including a far better engine. Their new engine is about equal to Nissan's ten year old design. GM now has the Colorado/Canyon pair which are also completely new designs. A diesel engine is available, though I regard that as not worth the price. Ford is making noises about bringing back the Ranger mid-size pickup.

The Nissan has met my expectations very well. It gets much better fuel economy than the Chevrolet in spite of having far more power. I get typically 20 to 22 mpg in highway driving without the camper. Compare to the Chevy at 16 to 18mpg. The camper cuts that down a lot, mainly due to wind resistance.

The Nissan gets 12 to 14 mpg with the camper, while the Chevy was more like 9 to 11mpg. Maintenance costs have been almost nothing, while the Chevy cost me several thousand dollars by the time it had 70,000 miles.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Do you have an exceptional tow vehicle? Email sarah@cooltears.com with pictures and information on it to see it featured in one of the coming *Towing a Tiny Trailer* articles.

Midwest **TEARDROPS**



by Tracy Hradzinski

by Tracy Hmielowski

Shortly after Bryan and I moved to Wisconsin from the southeast, we started dreaming of a camping upgrade. Living rooms on wheels are of no interest to us, but we liked the simplicity of Teardrop Campers. The idea of a camper outfitted with only the amenities we needed appealed to our practical side. After renting a teardrop and spending a long, rainy, weekend cozy and dry inside the cabin – I was sold. We researched various designs, options, and manufacturers. Bryan even contemplated designing and building a teardrop. However, we kept coming back to So-Cal Teardrops.





We fell in love with the classic teardrop curves, the Baltic birch woodwork, the degree of customization offered, and most of all, the meticulous fit and finish. We contacted Midwest Teardrops, the nearest Regional Manufacturer of So-Cal designs. Our conversations about purchasing a camper evolved into an opportunity to buy the business, which we did in December of 2017.

...life by the 'Drop

TC

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**** CALIFORNIA DESIGNS. HAND BUILT IN THE MIDWEST ****

Midwest Teardrops is an opportunity for us to do something we are passionate about, getting outdoors. Both of us sought out careers in conservation, where we were able to spend most of our time working outside. Bryan worked for The Nature Conservancy for over ten years, in locations from the Midwest to the Southeast. I worked in locations from south Florida to Yellowstone National Park. We look forward to future travels in our teardrop and we hope our campers will help other people get outside to do the same.

Midwest Teardrops is a regional manufacturer of So-Cal Teardrops. We are headquartered in Owatonna, Minnesota, and primarily service Minnesota and the Dakotas. It is an honor to be working with So-Cal, and we benefit from their years of experience and engineering expertise. For those not familiar with So-Cal, they started building teardrops in 2004, when building a couple campers for family members turned into selling eight campers at the county fair! Thirteen years and hundreds of teardrops later, So-Cal has a network of seven regional manufacturers.



Bryan's first teardrop build was our demo camper, built this past January. The build was part of his training and a chance to get to know, and learn from, all of the members at So-Cal Headquarters. January is also a great time of year to spend a few weeks in southern California, especially when you get to skip the blizzard that hit southern Minnesota earlier this year. For Bryan, the time spent working side by side with the So-Cal team, and seeing the attention to detail that goes into every trailer, was invaluable.



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With dozens of custom features available, each trailer is inherently unique. Our demo model, a '510 Cascade' crossover teardrop, truly represents our needs, focusing on storage and camp cooking. We will be traveling extensively throughout the upper Midwest and plan to visit family in the Southeast and Pacific Northwest. The 5' x 10' cabin provides roomy sleeping quarters for the two of us and our dog, Barley. To stow gear, we opted for storage on the front tongue and under the mattress. The galley kitchen has upgraded cabinets to keep everything organized.



When working with customers to design a camper, we recognize that everyone accesses the outdoors differently. While at a recent event, we had the chance to talk to hundreds of people about how they travel and we were proud to be able to offer a custom teardrop to suit so many individuals. Midwest Teardrops offers a variety of configurations and options that can be tailored to the customer's lifestyle. With three increasingly rugged chassis configurations – Road, Crossover, and Off-Road - we have teardrops capable of anything from cross-country road trips, rugged forest roads, or backcountry adventures.



**** SMALL BUSINESS. BIG DREAMS ****

While taking over an existing business may be thought of as easier than establishing a new one, it is still a long and difficult journey. Fortunately, Bryan has some experience working with a small startup business. Prior to taking ownership of Midwest Teardrops, Bryan was the Brewmaster at a small brewpub and distributing brewery. When you are involved in a small business, you must wear many hats. While working at the brewpub, Bryan became well versed in

regulations, taxes, budgeting, forecasting, supply chain, marketing, sales, and many other roles. This experience has been very helpful in getting Midwest Teardrops up and running, though there has been plenty learn along the way.

As we head into our first summer camping season, we are excited to take our teardrop on the road to explore new places and meet new people. Hopefully, we will meet some of you!

More info about Midwest Teardrops:

www.midwestteardrops.com

bryan@midwestteardrops.com

A map of Regional Manufacturers of So-Cal Teardrops: <http://www.midwestteardrops.com/home/where-to-buy/>



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by Sarah Tucker

There simply is nothing like a teardrop gathering. The anticipation and preparation is exciting. The travel is generally beautiful. But the event itself always leaves me smiling when I reflect back on the wonderful memories. As I use simple words and share photos of the 4th Annual Gathering of the Southwest Teardrop and Vintage Trailers, it's my hope you can see the excitement and fun and begin to plan your own adventure to a gathering near you.



4TH ANNUAL GATHERING

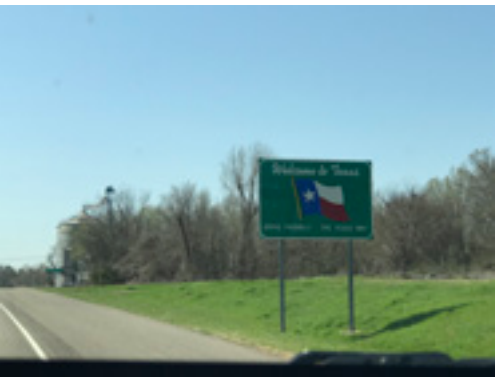


A year ago, I stumbled upon the [Southwest Teardrop and Vintage Trailer Facebook page](#) and was immediately impressed with the leadership and friendship the group presented. The group sent pictures from their recent gathering and Shelley Tumino sent a write up for the magazine. I knew then that if able, this was a gathering I wanted to attend in the future. Fast forward several months, my trailer was built and Shelley began posting about their 2018 gathering. It just so happened that my kids spring break would fall the same week as the gathering so we sign right up!

We left Kansas City, in route to Tyler State Park on Wednesday afternoon with an overnight in Tulsa, OK. It was a cold, icy winter in KC so we were excited to be headed south to warmer temps. The rv Park we stayed at was crowded and

honestly not that great but it worked for a quick overnight. We set up the girl's Oz Tent, ate a quick sandwich and then had a blast playing games as the sun set.





Thursday morning dawned bright and sunny and we headed south again for a five hour trip on to the gathering. The further south we drove, the more apparent spring became as the grass turned green, the flowers were in bloom and the trees leaves out! It was so fun to pull into the state park and immediately see several other tiny campers lined up at the front office. In fact, standing line to register was our campsite neighbor, Susan and her tiny dog, Bella!

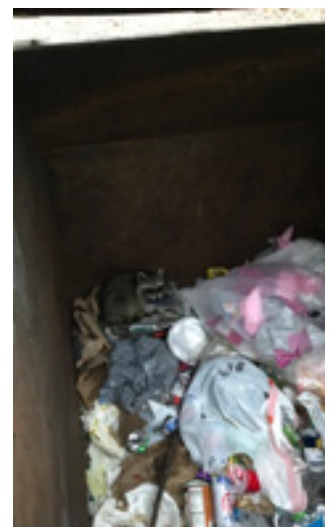
Our campsite was right on the lake and large enough to easily accommodate our setup. Several other members of the group were already in camp and it was great to meet in person several folks I had corresponded with in the past. That evening we enjoyed a family meal and then wandered



around checking out all the awesome campers. I was thrilled to see Jim and Marilyn with their beloved Ambassador. Marilyn has been a faithful contributor to our magazine and I look forward to having more stories from her in the future.



The raccoons in Tyler State Park are legendary. We left our cooler sitting out during our little walk and the rascals got some of our deli meat. Several mornings my husband found a little raccoon inside one of the large dumpsters. These guys are known for coming right up and eating out of your hand!





Friday morning dawned windy. Very windy. We made biscuits and gravy in our Dutch oven and watched a lovely group of ducks in the lake. As more campers rolled in, our family drove into downtown Tyler to check out the Azalea Trail.



We were surprised at the size of the historic downtown neighborhood and those flowers were out of this world beautiful. The Python House was certainly worth



stopping for and we enjoyed wondering around the grounds for a good while.

We even got the chance to chat with the owner, a wonderful southern belle, who immediately fell in love with my little girls. In fact, she tried to keep them!

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during a Facebook live video I took for the Cool Tears page. Each winner took home amazing prizes of handmade hot pads, hand crafted fire pokers and the first place winners were given awesome campfire tripods.

Friday night back at the campground, we all gathered in the open space of the large loop and enjoyed a hot dog dinner and Dutch oven competition. Let me tell you, these southern folks can whip up some amazing dishes in their Dutch ovens. They put the Crossroads of America Dutch oven competition to shame with the sheer volume of entries! Our lovely camp hosts served as judges (I was a bit jealous) as we all filled our plates with hot dogs and sides. The winners were announced

And then the real competition was on...the night lights competition began at dusk with everyone pulling out all the stops to light up their own sites. It was so cool to see all the different kinds of lights and my girls decided it's time for us to up our lights game.

Saturday morning we all gathered again for coffee (thanks, Becky!) and a baggie omelet breakfast.





This was a first for me but man was it ever yummy! We cracked eggs into a sandwich baggie and then had all sorts of stuff to add in like cheese, peppers, ham, mushrooms and even wild hog meat. The baggie were then sealed tight and dropped into huge pots of boiling water for 15 minutes. The result was a funny looking, yet very delicious omelet.

The very best part of any gathering is meeting people from all over. I have learned every tiny camper owner loves to talk about their camper. Just walk up and say, "Tell me a little about your camper!" I spent most of Saturday morning and afternoon visiting as many campsites as possible. Along the way, I saw some great campers and gleaned some neat ideas for my own teardrop. But better than that, I made some great new friends. A born introvert, it's never been easy for me to talk with people and make friends. But sitting at a campsite and chatting about campers has enabled me to break out of that shell and really make great friends. I doubt the conversation I shared with Bob and Brenda from Frisco will ever be forgotten and it formed the basis for what will be a lifelong friendship.





Saturday afternoon we held a camper Open House and I would estimate over 200 folks came through to checkout the gathering. The Open House was a fantastic way to bring more people into the park and to educate more folks on what it means to "camp tiny." It's also an amazing way to meet even more people. The young girl in the picture to the left stopped by during the open house with a single string guitar she made in Girl Scouts. This brave 10 year old is also a 5 year cancer survivor and she played "Happy Birthday" for me on that little guitar...very impressive.





A huge potluck dinner was held Saturday night as the final event of the gathering. The tables were loaded with some of the most delicious camp food I've ever seen. It really did remind of a good 'ol church dinner (that's a real thing here in the Bible Belt) and I thoroughly enjoyed every minute. Prizes were handed out for all sorts of categories and door prizes were picked up for those who participated. I received a beautiful hand made camp blanket that will be a treasured addition to our camping throws.

One couple set up a photo booth and everyone had a great time cheesing it up for the camera

and walked away with keepsake pics from the weekend.

As goodbye hugs were given, I was again hit with an overwhelming gratitude for what Teardrop gatherings have provided for my family. Our camping family grew once again this weekend and a bond was built with the people of the Southwest that I will treasure forever. So to Shelley, Tony and Roger (founding members of the group), thank you for building a wonderful army of campers that welcomed my family with open arms and left us with memories that will last a lifetime.



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