

RVing - the long and the short of it

by Jaimie Hall Bruzenak

What length RV is best?



Our New Horizon 5th wheel: Traveling in our 33-foot New Horizon 5th wheel this summer is much more comfortable than last, but sometimes I long for the small size of the Lance camper we used last summer. What is the perfect size? How do you decide what length RV to purchase? I posed these questions at a YahooGroup bulletin board. The answers ranged from an 11-foot T@B trailer to a 41-foot 5th-wheel with an overall rig length of 65 feet!

Comfort

Roy and Kathy went straight from a "stick house" to full-time RVing, so Lance comfortable space was important. "We chose a 35-foot fifth-wheel with three slides. A sliding door between the bedroom and the rest of RV helps divide the space so that two TVs can accommodate different shows and/or reading/TV for two people."

Bill and Barb Fageol wanted a washer/dryer, so they bought a 36-footer. "We would prefer a shorter RV and, if we had it to do over, we now know we could put the washer/dryer in the kitchen in place of the gas oven we don't use. But in actuality we also want two computer work stations, so maybe we really aren't interested in downsizing!"

Padraic and Willie Ley are not typical full-timers. Their rig is 65 feet in overall length, plus they have a minivan. They like the outskirts of big cities. They are too young to retire so work on the Internet during the week and play on the weekends. Says Padraic, "We drove only 15,000 miles with the truck and trailer the last three years."



But Can It Fit?

RVers recognize that size can be limiting. Says Laura Bornkamp, "Twelve years ago we bought a 38-foot motorhome (no slide). Then we bought a 35-foot motorhome with two slides, then a 40-foot pusher. We love our motorhome now, but the 35-foot one was the best, because it was smaller, easier to maneuver, and you can get into older parks and campgrounds."

Joe & Margie Heugly spent three years making decisions leading up to their RV purchase. Length was carefully considered and researched. They are very happy with their Cameo fifth-wheel. However, in posting feedback about a campground, they stated, "We had to pass by many sites when selecting our spot, as they were too small or too narrow for our 36-foot fifth-wheel with slides on both sides. If we had wanted to park further from the lake we would have had more sites that fit our trailer."

Glenda and Gerald Farris went from a 36-foot motorhome to a 40-foot one to get more basement room and a larger kitchen. Says Glenda, "I usually call ahead instead of just showing up to make sure they have a space that can accommodate us. Since we have a wide-body, we use the Motor Carrier's Road Atlas to double-check that our route is a designated 18-wheeler route when traveling rural roads."

If you don't do outdoorsy things and nearly always stay in RV parks, large can work. Margaret Serafin and her husband chose a 40-foot, triple-slide fifth-wheel as their full-time rig, towing it with a medium duty truck (MDT). "Our size does limit the roads we take and the places we stay, but the truck can go most anywhere but four-wheeling."

Ease of Driving and Parking



Some RVers choose their length strictly for ease of driving and parking. Chuck Wright and Nan Aman no longer RV fulltime but wanted a smaller rig for their summer travels. Explains Chuck, "I considered a number of conventional trailers around 18 feet, but they were heavier than I wanted to pull with the van. The T@B travel trailer, reminiscent of the older "tear-drop" trailers, includes only what is important: an ample bed/sitting area and adequate though minimal kitchen in a well-built package. The trailer is 15 feet long, including the tongue, so the living space is about 6 feet by 11 feet. What makes it

work is having the van for storage and extra space." For most of us, that is way too small, especially when you consider that there are no bathroom facilities inside the T@B.

Adrienne Kristine, solo RVer and author, has lived fulltime in two shorter rigs: one 22 feet long and her current 18 footer. According to Adrienne, the advantage of the 18-foot RV is, "She fits in an average parking space and is easy to drive and handle." However, it lacks convenience. The dinette is also the bed; the shower is the whole bathroom and needs to be wiped down after each use. Adrienne rents storage space for things that don't fit.



Compromise?

Very recently, Adrienne purchased a medium-length rig. Her new (to her) RV is a 27-foot Southwind. "There is plenty of storage (including basement storage) so I can empty my storage room. The Adrienne Kristine's new RV motorhome is larger than an average parking space but I don't think I'll have much trouble parking her in a lot or on the street. She's large enough to hold everything, and small enough (and safe enough) for me to drive comfortably."

Stephanie and Paul Bernhagen explain their purchase: "We went short when we started RVing so that we could get into national parks and other places that had limited space for RVs. Our first fifth-wheel was 28 feet and the last 29 feet."

Marilyn Bintz and her husband originally had a large fifth-wheel. They loved the roominess but found they were not traveling much. Says Marilyn, "When we decided to just travel my husband wanted a motorhome. We enjoyed dry camping, national parks, and forest service campgrounds. Our absolutes were: under 30 feet, a walk-around bed, a fully useable bathroom, a comfortable place for both of us to sit, and tinted windows. We purchased a 27-foot Class C with two slides and are now on our sixth year of traveling in it with no regrets."

Betsy Crawford and her husband had a wide-body, 35-foot fifth-wheel with two slideouts that was actually 36 feet, 10 inches. They wished it was shorter, so they found a 34-foot New Horizon fifth-wheel with three slideouts. Says Betsy, "This makes it just as roomy as our 36 footer."

Andy Baird, writer, went from a 22-foot to a 25.5-foot Class C for more room and comfort. He remodeled it to include an office with a comfortable chair. Notes Andy, "I take it everywhere from big cities to small towns to wilderness areas-I'm quite comfortable traveling without a towed car. Anything smaller and I'd feel cramped; anything bigger and I'd need a 'toad.'"

Two Rigs



Linda and Earl Hylton had a 33-foot fifth-wheel. Then they decided they wanted a shorter rig to fit in Forest Service campgrounds. They bought a 23.5-foot Lazy Daze Class C plus a home base in Quartzsite, Arizona, since they wouldn't enjoy full-time RVing in something that small. Now they are back to a 32-foot fifth-wheel. Says Linda, "We know that we won't be able to get into some of the places we like to camp, but this is a temporary situation since, once our name comes up for a lot at an Escapee park in the Northwest, we'll park the fifth-wheel at our lot during the summer and get a slide-in truck camper to travel in. We'll then use the fifth-wheel to travel in the Southwest during the winter."

Some full-timers want to have the best of both worlds. Guy Gibson, who chose a 35-foot motorhome, says, "I'm thinking of getting a small 4WD camper that is towable, so I can park the "house" and go places that are more peaceful than I usually find."

Choosing RVs - all sorts of lengths

Choosing the length of your rig is a matter of priorities. With a really long rig, you are limited in where you can drive and park. Many older campgrounds and public campgrounds cannot accommodate such a large rig or may only have one or two spaces that do. In addition, you may have trouble maneuvering.

On the other hand, going too short means you give up comfort and extras like washer/dryers. In the Lance camper, for example, the only place to sit was the dinette and that was not comfortable for reading, relaxing or using the computer.

Dave and Sandy Baleria gave their purchase of a full-time rig a lot of thought as well as research. "We targeted as our full-timing RV, a fifth-wheel with four other criteria:

- Under 30 feet, so we have a lot of freedom to get just about anywhere we want to go
- Over 3,000 pounds of cargo capacity, due to true full-timing with no land, no lot
- Not a wide-body, for driving off the freeways with comfort
- Slideouts only on the left side, not on both sides, as they don't fit well in places such as Elks or Moose lodge parking or older campgrounds."

They actually bought an 28-foot Excel with two slides with 4,450 pounds of cargo capacity, rated at 4 stars in the RV Consumers Group. Says Dave, "Few other RVs in this size range have as much cargo capacity. But we teach RVing seminars, carry a lot of guide books and electronic and other teaching material." They also carry kayaks and other hobby equipment.



There is no "one size fits all." Says Margaret, "Bigger works for us but may not be the ideal for the next traveler. The length of time you plan to spend on the road as well as the activities you enjoy are determining factors in the length of your RV."

This summer's trip has been a tradeoff for us too. Sometimes I look down a road or into a campground where we could have taken the Lance and sigh. But when I lean back in my recliner to read a good book, I remember why we are in the New Horizon and I am content.

