Tears of Joy
From Roads to Adventure, Fall 1998
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Check on Teardrop and Tiny Travel Trailers for up to date building information;
http://www.mikenchell.com/forums
They're Back!
TEARDROP TRAILERS & CLASSIC CARS
These tagalongs are small in size, big on fun, light in weight and heavy on nostalgia.

A beautifully-restored '40 Ford "Woody" towing an equally beautiful matching "Woody" teardrop brings back memories of Route 66 before it was lost under Interstate 40.

by Jack Innis
Teardrop trailers are simple, versatile, low-cost, tow-anywhere camping trailers with living space as great as all outdoors. A mere 4 feet wide by 4 feet tall and 8 to 10 feet long, teardrop trailers provide only basic accommodations: a cozy bunk with just enough room to sleep, a bit of overhead storage space and a chuck wagon-style outdoor kitchen under a rounded tailgate that swings up from the trailer's rear.

What these little tag-alongs lack in amenities, however, they make up for in appeal. They compel the camper to truly be one with the environment. Pots and pans clanking in the "outdoor kitchen" harmonize with whistling breezes and chirping birds. A folding table and chairs serve as a dining room under the sky. Conversation proceeds until the campfire cedes to the stars.

Yes, they're fun, but not everyone is cut out to camp in a teardrop trailer. It's a fact: Teardrops are tiny. Little room exists for dogs, guests or kayaks. Inside most teardrops, a standard-size double bed (where mom, dad and baby can snuggle up) consumes the entire floor, leaving...
only a small cabinet above the bed and a shelf on the end for storage. To get out of the bed, you have to get out of the trailer. Crank handle windows—not air conditioning—ventilate these cozy nests. Lights (12-volt DC) wired to the tow vehicle—not a generator—provide illumination. Sleeping bags—not a heater—warm the occupants. There's room to sleep, room to sit and room to stretch out, but not to stand.

"But that's exactly what makes them fun," says Grant Whipp, publisher of Tales & Trails (T&T), a newsletter that reaches out to teardrop aficionados. "Believe it or not, there are people who think that crawling out of the sack and savoring the smell of fresh-brewed coffee blended with the scent of a pine forest isn't such a great way to start the day," he says. Grant believes in the teardrop's use-

Tears Are for Touring

Television shows, cover stories, photo shoots—heck, it doesn't get any better than this, exclaimed teardrop trailer lovers at the second annual SCATT (Southern California Touring Tows) Guajome Park gathering in northern San Diego County in late February.

One organizer scratched his head in amazement. "Last year we had 34 teardrops; this year, 64," said Bud Romenie. "We have to turn people away, but this is a capacity crowd. We're trying to negotiate with the park rangers to let us double up the trailers in the stalls next March. After all, we are small."

Huell Howser spent two hours interviewing various SCATT members for his KCET-TV show, Visiting...Huell Howser, while sidekick/cameraman Luis Fuerte dutifully taped the results. Teardrops are a great favorite of street rodders, so they can sleep near their expensive rods.

Cheyenne, Wyoming, with his 1947 Kit Camper in tow. The Highway Patrol in Salt Lake City, Utah, turned him back due to bad weather. He drove all the way to Denver, Colorado, and was turned around again near the Eisenhower Tunnel. He finally quit and drove home, muttering something about "El Ninó!@#$%"

How did three teardrop trailers wind up getting their own room in Harrah's National Automobile Museum in Reno, Nevada? Well, Debbie and Mike Smith were showing their 1950 Kampmaster at a car show, and one of Harrah's museum administrators came up and asked, "What is this?" Debbie grinned and said, "I can get more." The display, titled "Home on the Road," ran for four months and featured split-rail fences and chirping crickets to capture the ambiance of early trailering life.

Why has there been such an resurgence in the popularity of tiny teardrop trailers? Says Ann Marcus, "Old posters, ads, pictures and even plans keep surfacing, piquing renewed or new interest." Ann likes to display a print memorabilia along with her 1927 Gypsy Caravan.

"Ninety-nine percent of us use our teardrops for camping. I take mine on fishing trips six weeks out of the year in the high Sierra," volunteers Don Togo, who camps under the big sky with his 5-year-old canine, Samantha.

"People with street rods are looking for something extra—a fresh project—plus a place to sleep at hot rod shows," offers David Locke.

Jackie Romenie, co-director of the San Diego gathering, says, "Interest in antiques helps pull us interest in tiny teardrops. This includes period pieces from the '30s, '40s and '50s, such as bikes, lanterns, stoves and other cooking gear."

—Jack Marcus

While SCATT, people (they refuse to call themselves a club and have no dues, no officers, no meetings) did their thing during the three-day gathering amid the normal crowd of onlookers. Huell Howser filmed a television segment for his Los Angeles, California, KCET Show, Visiting...Huell Howser (a counterpart to his California Gold documentary series). Howser and his famous sidekick/cameraman, Luis Fuerte, spent two hours interviewing people and poking around the teardrops. The Guajome Park gathering also included a potluck dinner and lots of show-and-tell among the proud owners, many of whom boast matching tow vehicles for their tiny teardrops. The most famous no-show for this event was Tom Hansen, who left before the show opened. He drove all the way to Denver, Colorado, and was turned around again near the Eisenhower Tunnel. He finally quit and drove home, muttering something about "El Ninó!@#$%".
Yes! You Can Take the Kids: Teardrop Add-Ons

Many original teardrops had add-on rooms that were fastened to the trailers. They ranged from simple awnings to large rooms that could be divided. Some are still in use.

Add-ons can be custom-designed.

Do you need an extra bedroom (with floor) for the kids? An indomitable-weather living room? Kitchen shade or wind protection? A place to stand up and change clothes?

Does baby make three? Early teardropers often used a wide shelf over the lower part of the bed for a child's bunk.

Went a shower? Go for solar. These great little shower units are popular for out-the-boondocks camping and expandable as potty enclosures or changing rooms.

The easiest way to attach an add-on room is to the RV owning reel, which is fastened to the teardrop. The tent material is fastened tightly around a cord, which is then pulled through the reel, creating a snappy, watertight room. Snaps and zippers also work in certain places.—Lisa Wavre

Tears of Joy

Fall 1998 49

Roads to Adventure

Nunance. "Save 'em, restore 'em, buy 'em, build 'em, but use 'em" is the TFR credo.

Tales of trailering teardrops far and wide abound. Richard Slayten, of Whistler, British Columbia, Canada, traveled through nine countries in Europe, including Russia, Estonia and Latvia, in his 1946 Kibbard teardrop. Including Canada, the United States and Mexico, the tiny tow-along has visited 12 countries in 49 years. Last year, Fred and Mary Duns Moor toyed their 1940s Modernistic teardrop from Waukee, Iowa, all the way to a gathering at Lake Shasta, California.

Even short treks bring great rewards. Bill and Joyce Baglie of Clearwater, Florida, brought their little tagalong to the 12-hour races at Sebring, Florida. Parked amid all the $500,000 motorhomes, guess what got all the attention? The cute little tear.

While short on wheelbase, teardrops are long on nostalgia. In fact, owners derive a great deal of joy from just owning a piece of Americana. Names of models such as a '46 Lawrence, a '48 Kesskill, or a '54 Benroy are whispered with the same reverence accorded famous antiques like Chipenden dale or Shaker. With the teardrops' resurgent popularity, enthusiasts are eagerly snatching up even dilapidated teardrops and bare-bone hulks from barns, fields and junkyards across the nation.

Oftentimes, the work and money invested in restoring a teardrop exceed the $2,000 or so it takes to buy a custom-built one. While some restored models fetch $2,500 to $10,000, many are flat-out not for sale. Most teardrop restorers are motivated by craftsmanship, not what the end product is worth. Moreover, many restoration projects take on the persona of the tow vehicle and may be painted and trimmed to match the restorer's '32 Ford Roadster, '48 Jeep or other street rod.

Even modern teardrop builders and restorers admit that it's the love of teardrops, not money changing hands, that provides motivation. Not motivated by money? Clearly, teardrops are not for everyone.

Yet the moment a teardrop pulls into a campground, everyone in the park huddles over to take a look. It's instant camaraderie. Some lookie-loos, beholding the curious little trailers for the very first time, believe they are looking at some sort of curious luggage trailers, not functioning RVs. Those more in the know may be swept up by nostalgia. From the 1920s through the 1960s, when teardrop popularity was at its peak, these tiny tagalongs provided many Americans with their first camping experiences.

磐em see them and relive happy times," says Brad Romaline, a retired firefighter from Julian, California, who owns a restored 1956 Benroy. To Brad, a lot of the fun in owning a teardrop is seeing people's reactions to it.

Andre Cuada of Modesto, California, is bringing nostalgia to life with the restoration of her Benroy teardrop. She recalls her parent's unusual use of a teardrop. It was the 1940s; she was the oldest of four children, and her parents were trying to make ends meet.

"My parents had a Kit teardrop, back when we were dirt poor. They owned a couple acres of land with a barn, but father was sort of a nomad. He didn't like working for people. Over a five- or six-year period, we traveled from one area to another, searching for work. We parked our teardrop—never in auto courts or tent cities—wherever we found work. Picking oranges in Southern California, gathering black walnuts in the central San Joaquin Valley, harvesting leaf mold and ladybugs to sell to strawberry farmers and chopping Christmas trees in Oregon—we did it all.

"The teardrop served as a focal point. We kids slept in the trailer, while our folks slept in the truck. We bathed in streams and received whatever education we could, some..."
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Buying Tears

These are three ways to obtain a teardrop: Find an old one, build one from scratch using instruction from a 1947 Mechanix Illustrated magazine, or get one from a modern builder. Used ones can be found in the April 1947 Mechanix Illustrated magazine classified ads section. Latest and best new ones can be found in the May 1947 Mechanix Illustrated magazine classified ads section. Latest and best new ones can be found in the May 1947 Mechanix Illustrated magazine classified ads section.

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nickel mine. In the morning, I strolled around a bit, only to discover an unmark-
ed open-pit mine nearby. It was more than 800 feet deep and had water and who
knows what else in the bottom!"

For those who travel where no other RVer dare tread, teardrops are
favorite camping vehicles. They'll faithfully
follow the tow vehicle where many
other trailers would be too cumbersome.

"Few people know it," Lance says,
"but the desert can be windy and rainy in
the winter, enough to shred a tent. But the
tear drop is comfortable in those conditions."

What teardrops lack in size, amenities and storage capacity, they make
up for with simplicity, charm and rugged-
ness. Their owners get a great deal of joy
just from owning a teardrop trailer.

Whatever vintage or modern, tiny teardrops
are definitely not for everybody. But size one
up? maybe it's just right for you. "

Jack Ingers has published more than 100
articles, essays and short stories, most of
which deal with the great outdoors.

THE NITTY-GRITTY

Most teardrop trailers are designed around a 4'x6' sheet of plywood that
seats atop a steel frame supported by a single axle. A wood or steel frame supports alu-
minaum walls, roof and the small side doors.
The interior is inhabited and often finished
with high-quality joinery. The back end of the
tear drop opens like a car trunk, revealing a
chuck wagon-style kitchen with a built-in
cooler, cooktop, sink and fridge. Lumber
cuts, folding tables and various pieces
provide diners with panoramic views. Portable toilets and
cabinets are stow-away items.

Tear drug trailers were designed and
developed in the '30s and '40s, an era in
which most automobiles had little power.

Logging in at a lean 800 pounds average,
even a fully loaded tear drop will easily
tow behind any suitably equipped car, truck
or sport-utility vehicle. Weather and other stow-
ables should be stacked over the axle in
a manner that prevents shifting. This will
help keep the tongue weight to a manage-
able 80-100 pounds. — Jack Ingers

Parents' Guide to Hiking & Camping: A Trailside Guide by Alice Cary; $18.95 softcover; 271 pages

S

ometimes, you really can judge a book by its cover. My

maxim is: If the pages of a book smell good, if the
cover is shiny and it feels like a cold pillowcase, buy it. Per-
haps I'm overly tactile, or maybe I just believe that any publisher
who goes to all that trouble to meet my visceral needs must
have a book that deserves opening.

As it turns out, Parents' Guide to Hiking & Camping has plenty
of substance behind its style. Here's all the information you'll
need to plan your next family camping trip, from planning
meals and snacks children will eat, to choosing hiking trails and
campsites that are family-friendly. "Ages and
Stages" sections focus on age-specific issues
and "Parent-to-Parent" sections highlight trail-
tested tips from experienced hiking and camping families from across the country.

Important tips that only a savvy insider would
know are sprinkled throughout the book. How-tos,
such as how to learn to read between the lines of campground
directories; how to get your child up the mountain; how to pick a
trail; and mostly importantly, how to turn your kids into hikers,
not whiners, are invaluable.

An entire whole chapter is
devoted to choosing age-appropri-
te gear for your children, with
ratings on specific brands. So
before you go out and spend a
fortune on hiking boots for your
children (if you have any money
left over after buying yours), read
what Alice Cary recommends. It
will save you time and money.

Because there is so much in-
formation to absorb, I suggest
that you read this book long be-
fore you actually go on your vacation. That way,
because you will be so well prepared when you
leave for your journey, you might actually feel like
you've been on a vacation when you return.

Published by W.W. Norton, Parents' Guide to
Hiking & Camping is available from Adventurous
Travelers Bookstore, (800) 282-3963. — JENNY KEAST

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