

Towable and Drivable RVs Explained

Recreational vehicles (RVs) come in two standard types: towable and drivable. Each type is available in various configurations, styles, brands, sizes, and a wide range of costs.

Towables

Towable RVs must be pulled (towed) with another vehicle and are available in two primary configurations, including...

- **The 5th wheel...** is towed behind a truck and requires a special type of hitch that is mounted in the bed of the truck. You cannot tow a 5th wheel with a car. The 5th wheel is the largest towable RV.



- **A travel trailer...** is also pulled behind a vehicle and connected by a hitch. You can use nearly any vehicle for towing travel trailers. Travel trailers have been around since the 1940s and are still popular today because they can be towed by an array of vehicles.

There are two other models of towable units and both are somewhat collapsible. One has the top and bottom portion designed so they can be cranked up or down. You end up with nearly a full-height trailer with solid walls. The other utilizes some type of canvas material for the wall. The canvas allows the unit to collapse (or crank / fold down). Both of these models can be found and are moderately popular.

Drivables

"Drivable" RVs are available in three "classes" or "types." There is some overlap in available sizes in each type. However, each type is dramatically different from the others in size, shape, and amenities.

- **Class B...** These RVs are "van-shaped" and will handle just like that big car, big SUV, or pickup truck since they are built on a normal van chassis. These are the smallest of the drivable RVs but typically can be driven/parked anywhere just like a larger-but-normal vehicle. This feature makes them extremely handy for use in cities where parking is a challenge and they can go virtually anywhere any other "normal" vehicle can. For example, you can sleep/camp in the Class B—you just have less room. A Class B will likely fit in any campsite in North America.

In the 1980s and 1990s, when vans were commonly driven, some individuals would construct a sleeping and (sometimes) a cooking area—thus creating a homemade RV. The VW van in the 1960s and 1970s was often used for this application.

- **Class C...** This unit has the "van" cab and a trailer-like rear section—it looks like a big box was set on the back of a van. It is distinguishable by the classic front sleeper—traditionally one bed (or TV/entertainment module) is built to extend out over the cab of the vehicle on many models.



These RVs range from 22–30+ feet (6.7–9+ m) long and are taller than the Class B. The Class C RVs require more driver attention to height and length (especially when turning, parking, and backing up) and parking may be limited due to length. Larger Class C RVs can tow a car (often called a “toad” or “dinghy”).

- **Class A...** These large coaches are the largest of the motorhomes. They are



full-sized rigs featuring the RV body built on a single chassis. This type also includes bus conversions—where individuals have custom-converted

a traditional passenger bus into a livable unit. These motorhomes usually start at around 30 feet (9 m)—twice the length of your normal car or truck—and range up to 45 feet (13.7 m) in length!

Class A motorhomes may contain all the amenities normally found in a house including a washer / dryer and dishwasher.

All three types are drivable but each has their own particular uniqueness and challenges as a moving vehicle. For example, add a tow car to a 35-foot (10.7 m) Class A and you instantly have a total length of about 55 feet (16.8 m)—making the overall length close to four times the length of a normal car!

Other Styles

One newer design is called the "toy hauler" (designed to haul and store adult "toys"—motorcycles, ATVs, etc.) inside, in the rear. Toy haulers are available in both towable and drivable RVs. They are unique, are some of the newest designs to the market, and meet a need. Toy haulers are typically marketed to the weekend user as the "toy" storage space consumes a significant portion of the living area. As shown below, creative use of the space can be beneficial to your lifestyle.



There is one other unique style... the pick-up camper (often called a "slide-in"). This unit literally slides into the bed of a pick-up truck.

Think About This

The following suggestions don't apply to all RVs but the larger your unit, the more applicable they will likely be. Since the Class B is the most similar to a "normal" vehicle (in size), you will have the shortest learning curve. If you have never driven a 40-foot (12.2 m) Class A diesel pusher, your learning curve will be more lengthy. If you have purchased a large vehicle—new to you—consider taking a driving class. After all, you don't want to scratch it—or you.