



RV Glossary

A reference guide to common RV terms and acronyms

140 terms • 37 acronyms • Weights, power, plumbing, towing & more

How to Use This Guide

This glossary explains the words, abbreviations, and slang you'll hear at dealerships, campgrounds, service centers, and in owner's manuals. Terms are listed alphabetically. Where a term is an acronym, its full name appears in *burgundy italics* beneath it, and every acronym is also collected in the quick-reference table at the end.

Getting around: click any letter below, or use the A-Z strip at the bottom of every page, to jump to that section. The PDF also includes bookmarks and is fully text-searchable (Ctrl+F or Cmd+F).

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U	V	W	Acronyms			

A note on accuracy: Definitions are general and apply to most RVs, but equipment, ratings, and procedures vary by manufacturer and model. Always confirm specifics with your owner's manual, weight labels, and a qualified RV technician.

0-9

4-Way / 7-Way Connector

The trailer wiring plug that links a tow vehicle to a trailer. A 4-way carries basic lighting; a 7-way adds electric brakes, a 12-volt charge line to the trailer battery, and reverse lights. Most travel trailers and fifth wheels use a 7-way.

12-Volt System

The RV's low-voltage DC system, powered by the house batteries. It runs lights, water pump, vent fans, furnace blower, slide motors, and control panels, so it keeps working even without shore power.

30-Amp Service

A single 120-volt, 30-amp electrical connection using a three-prong TT-30 plug. Common on smaller and mid-size RVs; usually enough for one air conditioner at a time.

50-Amp Service

A 120/240-volt, 50-amp connection using a four-prong 14-50 plug. It supplies two 50-amp legs (up to about 12,000 watts), enough for multiple air conditioners in larger RVs.

120-Volt System

The RV's household-style AC system, powered by shore power, a generator, or an inverter. It runs outlets, the microwave, air conditioners, and residential appliances.

A

A-Frame Camper

A hard-sided folding camper whose roof panels fold up into a peaked 'A' shape at camp and fold flat for towing.

Absorption Refrigerator

A traditional RV fridge that cools using a heat-driven ammonia process. It can run on propane or 120-volt power (a 2-way) and sometimes 12-volt power (a 3-way). Works best when the RV is level.

AC*Alternating Current*

Household-style electricity (120 or 240 volts) from shore power, a generator, or an inverter. Also used as shorthand for the air conditioner.

AGM Battery*Absorbed Glass Mat*

A sealed, maintenance-free lead-acid battery. It needs no watering and handles vibration well, but is heavier and offers less usable capacity than lithium.

Ah*Amp-Hour*

A measure of battery capacity. A 100 Ah battery can, in theory, deliver 5 amps for 20 hours. Lead-acid batteries should only be drained to about 50%; lithium can go much lower.

Anode Rod

A sacrificial metal rod screwed into a steel-tank water heater (such as Suburban). It corrodes instead of the tank and should be inspected yearly. Aluminum-tank heaters typically don't use one.

Anti-Sway Bar

A hitch accessory that uses friction or geometry to dampen side-to-side trailer movement caused by wind and passing trucks. Often built into a weight-distribution hitch.

ATS*Automatic Transfer Switch*

A device that automatically switches the RV's power source between shore power and the generator, so only one can feed the coach at a time.

Awning

A retractable fabric shade that extends from the side of the RV. It may be manual or powered, and many power awnings have wind sensors that retract them automatically.

B

Back-In Site

A campsite you must back the RV into, as opposed to pulling straight through.

Basement Storage

Pass-through or exterior storage compartments beneath the living floor, common on Class A motorhomes and fifth wheels.

Black Tank

The holding tank that collects toilet waste. It should be emptied at a dump station or sewer connection before the gray tank so gray water can rinse the hose.

Black Tank Flush

A built-in inlet that sprays water inside the black tank to rinse solids and help keep tank sensors accurate. Connect it with a dedicated non-potable hose.

BLM*Bureau of Land Management*

A federal agency managing public lands, largely in the western U.S. Many BLM areas allow free or low-cost dispersed camping, often up to 14 days.

Boondocking

Camping without hookups (no water, sewer, or electric), usually on public land or in remote areas. Also called dry camping or off-grid camping.

Brake Controller

A device in the tow vehicle that activates a trailer's electric brakes in proportion to the tow vehicle's braking. Required for most trailers with brakes.

Breakaway Switch

A safety switch on the trailer tongue, connected to the tow vehicle by a cable. If the trailer separates, the cable pulls a pin and the trailer's brakes engage automatically.

Bumper Pull

A trailer that hitches to a receiver at the rear bumper area of the tow vehicle, like a standard travel trailer. Also called a tag-along.

Bunkhouse

A floor plan with a separate area of bunk beds, popular with families.

**Cabover**

The sleeping or storage area above the cab on a Class C motorhome or truck camper.

Cargo Carrying Capacity*CCC*

The weight available for everything you load into the RV. It is typically calculated as GVWR minus UVW, full fresh water, and full propane (and, on motorhomes, passenger allowance). Check the weight label inside the RV.

Cassette Toilet

A toilet with a small removable waste cassette that is emptied by hand, common in vans and compact campers.

Chassis Battery

The motorhome's engine starting battery, separate from the house batteries that run the living area.

Class A Motorhome

The largest motorized RV, built on a bus-style or commercial truck chassis with a flat front and large windshield. Available in gas and diesel.

Class B Motorhome

A camper van built inside a standard van body. The most compact motorhome class; easy to drive and park.

Class B+

A motorhome larger than a camper van but smaller than a typical Class C, usually built on a van chassis without a full cabover bunk.

Class C Motorhome

A mid-size motorhome built on a van or truck cutaway chassis, usually recognizable by the cabover bunk above the cab.

CO Detector*Carbon Monoxide Detector*

A required safety alarm that warns of carbon monoxide from generators, engines, or fuel-burning appliances. Test it regularly and replace it by its expiration date.

Composting Toilet

A waterless toilet that separates liquids from solids and uses a medium such as coconut coir to break waste down, reducing dependence on a black tank.

Converter

Converts 120-volt AC shore or generator power into 12-volt DC to run the RV's 12-volt system and charge the house batteries.

Curb Side

The passenger side of the RV (where the entry door usually is). The driver's side is called the road side or street side.

**DC***Direct Current*

Low-voltage power (usually 12 volts) supplied by batteries and the converter; runs most RV lighting and controls.

DEF*Diesel Exhaust Fluid*

A urea solution required by most modern diesel engines to reduce emissions. The engine will limit power if the DEF tank runs empty.

Diesel Pusher*DP*

A Class A motorhome with a rear-mounted diesel engine. Known for quieter cabins, higher towing capacity, and air brakes and suspension.

Dinette

The RV's table-and-seating area, which often converts into a bed.

Dinghy

A vehicle towed behind a motorhome for local driving at the destination. Also called a toad.

Dispersed Camping

Camping outside of developed campgrounds on public land, with no amenities. See Boondocking.

Dogbone Adapter

A short electrical adapter cord that lets you plug into a different receptacle, such as a 50-amp RV into a 30-amp outlet (with reduced available power).

Dry Bath / Wet Bath

A dry bath has a separate shower stall. A wet bath is a single waterproof room where the toilet and sink get wet when you shower, common in small RVs.

Dry Weight

The weight of the RV as built, before water, propane, cargo, or passengers. See UVW.

Dually

DRW - Dual Rear Wheel

A pickup truck with two tires on each side of the rear axle, preferred for towing heavy fifth wheels.

Dump Station

A facility where RVers empty black and gray holding tanks into a sewer system. Also called a sani-dump.

E**Egress Window**

An emergency exit window, usually marked with a red handle. Know where yours is and make sure it opens freely.

EMS

Electrical Management System

An advanced surge protector that also monitors voltage and cuts power if the pedestal supplies high/low voltage, reversed polarity, or an open ground.

Engine Brake

A system that uses the engine to slow the vehicle, reducing wear on service brakes on long downgrades. On diesels, often called a Jake brake or exhaust brake.

F**Fifth Wheel**

A trailer that connects to a hitch mounted in the bed of a pickup truck, over or just ahead of the rear axle. Offers stable towing and a raised front bedroom. Often shortened to '5er'.

Four-Season RV

An RV marketed for cold-weather use, typically with extra insulation, heated and enclosed tanks, and dual-pane windows. Capabilities vary widely by manufacturer.

Fresh Water Tank

The onboard tank that stores clean, potable water for use when not connected to a city water supply.

Full Hookup

FHU

A campsite with water, sewer, and electric connections.

Full-Timer

Someone who lives in their RV year-round as their primary residence.

G**Galley**

The RV's kitchen area.

Gate Valve

The pull-handle valves that open and close the black and gray holding tanks at the sewer outlet. Some RVs use cable-operated or electric valves.

GAWR

Gross Axle Weight Rating

The maximum weight a single axle is rated to carry, including tires, wheels, and suspension.

GCWR

Gross Combined Weight Rating

The maximum allowable combined weight of the tow vehicle, trailer (or toad), and everything in both.

Generator

An onboard or portable engine-driven unit (gas, diesel, or propane) that produces 120-volt power when shore power isn't available. Often called a genset.

GFCI

Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter

A safety outlet or breaker that cuts power when it detects current leaking to ground. Found in bathrooms, kitchens, and exterior outlets; a tripped GFCI is a common cause of 'dead' outlets.

Glamping

Glamorous camping; camping with comfort and amenities.

Gooseneck

A trailer hitch that uses a ball in the truck bed. Some fifth wheels can be converted to tow with a gooseneck adapter.

Gray Tank

The holding tank that collects water from sinks and the shower. Some RVs have more than one gray tank.

GVWR

Gross Vehicle Weight Rating

The maximum the vehicle or trailer is allowed to weigh when fully loaded with cargo, fluids, and (for motorhomes) passengers. Never exceed it.

H**Heat Pump**

A roof air conditioner that can also run in reverse to provide electric heat in mild temperatures (roughly above 40 F).

Hitch Weight

The downward force the trailer places on the tow vehicle's hitch. See Tongue Weight and Pin Weight.

Holding Tanks

Collectively, the RV's fresh, gray, and black water tanks.

Hookups

The utility connections at a campsite: electric, water, and sewer (sometimes also cable TV or Wi-Fi).

House Battery

The deep-cycle battery or battery bank that powers the RV's living area 12-volt system, separate from the engine battery.

Hydronic Heating

A heating system that circulates heated fluid (often antifreeze) through the coach, commonly found in high-end motorhomes (e.g., Aqua-Hot or Oasis systems).

I**Inverter**

Converts 12-volt DC battery power into 120-volt AC so household devices can run without shore power or a generator. Pure sine wave inverters are best for sensitive electronics.

Inverter/Charger

A combined unit that inverts battery power to AC and also charges batteries when shore or generator power is available, often replacing a separate converter.

J**Jackknife**

When a trailer and tow vehicle fold toward each other at a sharp angle, which can damage both. Also the name of a fold-down sofa style common in RVs.

Jacks (Leveling / Stabilizer)

Leveling jacks (often hydraulic or electric) lift and level the RV. Stabilizer jacks only reduce bounce and sway; they are not meant to lift the RV.

K**King Pin**

The vertical steel pin on a fifth wheel's front overhang that locks into the fifth-wheel hitch in the truck bed.

KOA

Kampgrounds of America

A large franchise network of private campgrounds across North America.

L**Landing Gear**

The front jacks on a fifth wheel that support the trailer when it is unhitched.

Leveling Blocks

Stackable plastic or wood blocks driven onto to level the RV side to side or front to back.

LiFePO4 Battery

Lithium Iron Phosphate

The most common type of lithium RV battery. Lighter than lead-acid, with deeper usable capacity and longer lifespan, but needs a compatible charger and protection from charging in freezing temperatures.

Low-Point Drains

Valves or caps at the lowest points of the fresh water lines, used to drain the plumbing when winterizing.

LP / LPG

Liquefied Petroleum Gas

Propane. Powers the furnace, stovetop, water heater, and absorption fridge in many RVs. Stored in portable cylinders or a permanently mounted tank.

LP Detector

A safety alarm near the floor that detects leaking propane (which is heavier than air). Replace it by its expiration date, usually about 5 to 7 years.

M**Macerator Pump**

A pump that grinds waste and pushes it through a narrow hose, allowing tanks to be emptied uphill or over longer distances.

MH

Motorhome

A motorized RV with the driving compartment and living space in one vehicle (Class A, B, or C).

Moochdocking

Parking your RV at a friend's or family member's property, usually with few or no hookups.

N**Non-Potable Water**

Water not safe for drinking, such as rinse water at dump stations. Keep a separate hose for it.

O**OCCC**

Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity

An older rating for the combined weight of passengers and cargo a motorhome can carry. Largely replaced by CCC.

Off-Grid

Living or camping without external utility connections, relying on batteries, solar, generators, and tanks.

Overnight Parking

Short-term stays in parking lots of businesses that permit it. Always ask permission and follow local rules.

P**Park Model RV**

PMRV

A trailer-style RV built for long-term placement at a campground or resort rather than frequent travel.

PDI

Pre-Delivery Inspection

A detailed walk-through and systems check of a new or used RV before you take delivery. The best time to find and document problems.

Pedestal

The campground utility post containing the electrical outlets (and sometimes water) at each site.

Pin Weight

The downward weight a fifth wheel's king pin places on the truck's hitch, typically about 15 to 25% of the trailer's weight.

Pop-Up Camper

A lightweight folding trailer with canvas or soft sides that expands at camp. Also called a tent trailer.

Porpoising

A bouncing, up-and-down motion while driving, often caused by suspension, loading, or hitch setup.

Potable Water

Water safe for drinking. Use a drinking-water-safe hose to fill fresh tanks or connect to city water.

Pressure Regulator

An inline device that limits incoming campground water pressure (typically to about 40 to 55 psi) to protect RV plumbing.

Pull-Through Site

A campsite you can drive into and out of without backing up. Handy for large rigs and travelers who don't unhitch.

Q**Queen (RV / Short Queen)**

RV mattress sizing. A standard RV queen is often 60 x 80 in., while a 'short queen' is 60 x 74 in. Measure before buying sheets or a new mattress.

R

Receiver Hitch

The square tube mounted to a tow vehicle's frame that accepts ball mounts and hitch accessories. Rated by class and weight.

Residential Refrigerator

A household-style electric fridge used in some RVs. It needs shore power, a generator, or an inverter with enough battery capacity when off-grid.

Rig

Slang for an RV, or for the RV and tow vehicle together.

Road Side

The driver's side of the RV. Also called the street side. The opposite is the curb side.

Roof Membrane

The waterproof covering on many RV roofs, typically EPDM (rubber) or TPO. Requires periodic inspection and sealant maintenance.

RV

Recreational Vehicle

A motorized or towable vehicle that combines transportation with temporary living quarters.

RVIA

RV Industry Association

The industry trade group. An RVIA seal indicates the manufacturer certified the unit to applicable electrical, plumbing, and fire safety standards.

S

Sealant

Caulk-like material (often self-leveling on roofs) that seals seams, vents, and fixtures. Inspecting and resealing prevents water damage.

Sewer Hose

The flexible hose that connects the RV's waste outlet to a sewer inlet or dump station. Nicknamed the 'stinky slinky.'

Shore Power

External electric power from a campground pedestal or building outlet.

Slide-Out

A section of the RV wall that extends outward at camp to create more interior space. Moved by electric, hydraulic, or cable systems.

Snowbird

An RVer who travels to warmer regions for the winter months.

Solar Charge Controller

Regulates power from solar panels to safely charge batteries. MPPT controllers are more efficient than PWM, especially in cooler weather or partial sun.

Stabilizer Jacks

See Jacks. Used to reduce movement when parked, not to lift or level the RV.

Super C

A large Class C motorhome built on a heavy-duty truck chassis, often with a diesel engine and high towing capacity.

Surge Protector

A device plugged in between the pedestal and your power cord that protects the RV from power spikes and often indicates wiring faults. See EMS.

Sway

Side-to-side movement of a trailer while towing. Proper loading (roughly 10 to 15% tongue weight), tire pressure, and sway control help prevent it.

T

Tag Axle

A non-driven rear axle behind the drive axle on larger diesel pushers, helping carry weight.

Tank Heaters

Heating pads attached to holding tanks to prevent freezing in cold weather.

Tank Monitor

The panel that shows fresh, gray, black, and sometimes propane and battery levels. Sensors can read inaccurately when coated with debris.

Teardrop Trailer

A small, lightweight, teardrop-shaped trailer, usually with a sleeping area inside and a rear hatch kitchen.

Toad

A vehicle towed behind a motorhome, also called a dinghy. Flat towing ('four down') requires a vehicle approved for it.

Tongue Weight

The downward force a travel trailer places on the hitch ball. Generally recommended at about 10 to 15% of the trailer's loaded weight.

Tote Tank

A portable waste tank on wheels used to carry tank contents to a dump station without moving the RV.

Tow Rating

The maximum weight a vehicle is rated by its manufacturer to tow. Also check payload, hitch, and GCWR limits.

Toy Hauler

A trailer or motorhome with a rear ramp door and a 'garage' to carry motorcycles, ATVs, or other gear. The garage often doubles as living space.

TPMS

Tire Pressure Monitoring System

Sensors on each tire that report pressure and temperature to a display, alerting you to leaks or overheating before a blowout.

Travel Trailer

TT

A towable RV that attaches to a bumper or receiver hitch.

Truck Camper

A camper unit that sits in the bed of a pickup truck.

TT-30

The three-prong 30-amp RV receptacle found at campground pedestals. Not to be confused with a 240-volt dryer outlet.

U**Umbilical Cord**

Slang for the 7-way cable connecting a trailer to a tow vehicle.

Underbelly

The enclosed bottom of the RV that protects tanks and plumbing. Sometimes heated in four-season models.

UVW

Unloaded Vehicle Weight

The weight of the RV as manufactured, including a full generator fuel tank and engine fluids (if equipped), but without water, propane, cargo, or passengers. Often called dry weight.

V**Vent Fan**

A powered roof vent that pulls air in or out of the RV, important for ventilation and moisture control.

VIN

Vehicle Identification Number

The unique serial number for your motorhome or trailer, used for registration, insurance, and recalls.

W**Water Heater**

Heats water for sinks and shower. Tank-style heaters (commonly 6 to 10 gallons) run on propane and/or electric; tankless models heat water on demand.

Weight Distribution Hitch

WDH

A hitch system with spring bars that spreads tongue weight across the tow vehicle and trailer axles for more level, controlled towing.

Wet Weight

The RV's weight with full fresh water and propane tanks; closer to real-world weight than dry weight.

Winterizing

Protecting the RV's plumbing from freezing by draining water and either blowing out the lines or adding RV antifreeze. Dewinterizing reverses the process in spring.

Workamping

Working part-time, often at campgrounds or parks, in exchange for a site and/or pay.

Acronym Quick Reference

AC	Alternating Current / Air Conditioner	LiFePO4	Lithium Iron Phosphate (battery)
AGM	Absorbed Glass Mat (battery)	LP / LPG	Liquefied Petroleum Gas (propane)
Ah	Amp-Hour	MH	Motorhome
ATS	Automatic Transfer Switch	MPPT	Maximum Power Point Tracking (solar controller)
BLM	Bureau of Land Management	OCCE	Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity
CCC	Cargo Carrying Capacity	PDI	Pre-Delivery Inspection
CO	Carbon Monoxide	PMRV	Park Model RV
DC	Direct Current	PWM	Pulse Width Modulation (solar controller)
DEF	Diesel Exhaust Fluid	RV	Recreational Vehicle
DP	Diesel Pusher	RVIA	RV Industry Association
DRW	Dual Rear Wheel (dually)	TPMS	Tire Pressure Monitoring System
EMS	Electrical Management System	TPO	Thermoplastic roof membrane material
EPDM	Rubber roof membrane material	TT	Travel Trailer
FHU	Full Hookup	TT-30	30-amp RV receptacle
GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating	UVW	Unloaded Vehicle Weight
GCWR	Gross Combined Weight Rating	VIN	Vehicle Identification Number
GFCI	Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter	WDH	Weight Distribution Hitch
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating	5er	Fifth wheel (slang)
KOA	Kampgrounds of America		