Building a Teardrop Trailer, the “Tiny Tears” Way

“Tears of Joy”

These tagalongs are small in size,
Big on fun, light in weight,
And heavy on nostalgia

Roads to Adventure
Fall 1998

Excerpted from:
“Roads to Adventure”, Fall 1998
“Tears of Joy”

Tears are for touring

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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.

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By Jack Innis
“Tears of Joy”
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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...
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only a small cabinet above the bed and a shelf on the end for storage. To get out of 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.

“...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 scents of a pine-covered forest isn’t such a great way to start the day,” he says. Conant believes in the teardrop’s use-

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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 teardrop is comfortable in those conditions."

What teardrops lack in size, amenities and storage capacity, they make up for with simplicity, charm and ruggedness. Their owners get a great deal of joy just from owning a teardrop trailer. Whether vintage or modern, tiny teardrops are definitely not for everybody. But size one up; maybe it's just right for you!*

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

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* "The Nitty-Gritty"

Teardrop trailers are designed around a 4’x6’-foot sheet of plywood that rests atop a steel frame supported by a single axle. A wood or steel frame supports aluminum walls, roof and the small side door. The interior is paneled and often finished with high-quality joinery. The back end of the teardrop opens like a car trunk, revealing a cloak waggon-styled kitchen with a built-in cooler, cooking, sink and forest. Leave chains, folding tables and many provide diners with panoramic views. Portable toilets and showers are space-saving items.

Teardrop trailers were designed and developed in the '80s and '90s, on a era in which most automobiles had little power. Weighing in at a lean 600 pounds average, even a "fully loaded" teardrop will easily tow behind any suitably equipped car, truck or sport/utility vehicle. Firewood and other supplies should be stacked over the axle in a manner that prevents shifting. This will help keep the tongue weight to a manageable 40-100 pounds. — Jack Hors

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Great Reads

Parents’ Guide to Hiking & Camping: A Trailside Guide by Alice Cary. $18.95 softcover / 271 pages. 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, most importantly, how to turn your kids into, not whiners, are invaluable. An entire whole chapter is devoted to choosing age-appropriate gear for your children, especially 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 information to absorb, I suggest that you read this book long before 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. — Jenness Keast