



SMOOTH SLIDING

Demco's Autoslide fifth-wheel hitch takes the guesswork — and worry — out of towing with a shortbed truck

Towing fifth-wheels with shortbed trucks is more popular than ever. Beyond the ability to maneuver into tighter spots, the ability to drive around town solo in a more nimble truck has always been a big selling point. But there are inherent issues to deal with, primarily keeping the front of the trailer from crashing into the back of the truck cab when making sharp turns — especially when trying to back into an RV site.

Some fifth-wheel manufacturers tout rounded front caps that allow for tighter turns, but without special-

ized kingpin or hitch equipment, a fifth-wheel of that type still cannot be maneuvered to its full potential.

In the early years, hitches that could be manually released offered some relief to stressful turning, but stopping in advance to activate a lever was not exactly convenient and could be disastrous if the procedure was forgotten. Hitches that automatically slide back when turning made towing with shortbed trucks practical and Demco has raised the bar in the design and function of this type of mechanism.

The newly improved Demco Hijacker

Autoslide Ultra Series fifth-wheel hitch utilizes rack-and-pinion gear technology that offers up to 14 inches of travel when turning. The hitch is rated to tow fifth-wheels up to 18,000 pounds. There are three height adjustments to help level the truck and trailer and make sure there's adequate clearance between the top of the truck bed and fifth-wheel; 6 inches is the preferred clearance. High-quality powder-coated surfaces should deter rust for the life of the hitch.

Thinking outside the box, Demco designed its new fifth-wheel hitch to fit



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(1) Try using blue painter's tape when the truck bed is too dark and a black felt-tip marker won't show up. (2) After measuring from the rear of the truck bed, carefully measure from side-to-side to accurately determine the true center of the truck bed. (3) Again, blue painter's tape is used as an indicator of where the center of both bedrails will be placed.

industry standard bedrails as well as an under-bed mount that leaves the bed of the truck free of obtrusive rails. There's also an optional system that mounts the hitch to Ford trucks with the fifth-wheel hitch prep package. We chose the above-rail kit for the installation described here.

The Autoslide hitch has a double pivot head with locking jaws that makes connecting and disconnecting simple and smooth. Capture plates are available for kingpin boxes that will not work with the double-pivot head. For the test, a capture plate was needed to immobilize the MOR/ryde kingpin box. That's because the kingpin does not

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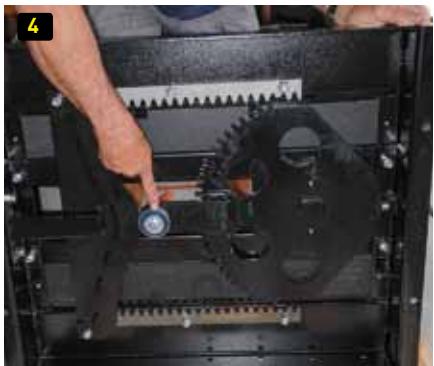
*Rates could be higher depending on health and build. Female rates are lower

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(4) Demco uses a high-quality bearing on its slide assembly. (5) The bedrail adapters are attached to the hitch body and tightened to 50 ft-lbs. The bolts are retorqued later. (6) Using an accurate torque wrench, tighten all bolts to the manufacturer's specifications. (7) Before drilling the holes for the bedrails, the hitch is installed onto the bedrails so that precision adjustments can be made. (8) When positioning the frame brackets, enlist the help of another person to install the nuts and lock washers on the bolts. (9) Use a $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch bit to drill the pilot hole through the existing hole in the frame bracket.

rotate in the hitch saddle when turning. Instead, the kingpin box is locked in the Autoslide pivot head, which rotates in the base while turning.

Installation

The instructions call for precise measurements before installing the slide-rail assemblies to the mainframe body. Once the proper distance

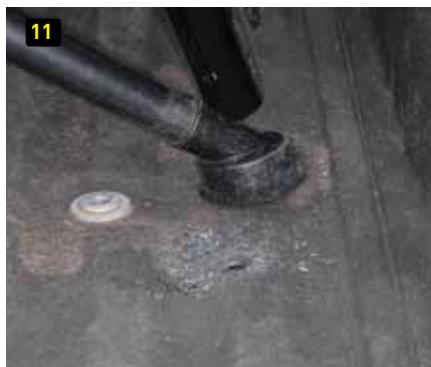
between the rear of the bed and rear rail is determined, we found it handy to lay down a strip of 1-inch-wide blue painter's tape from side to side. The blue masking tape made it much easier to see the black felt-pen marks that were darn near invisible to detect on the black spray-on lining.

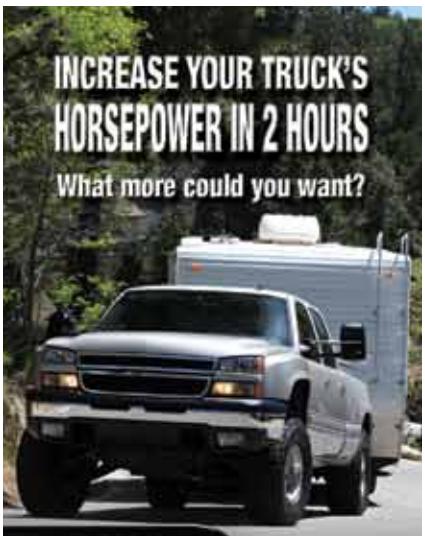
After measuring the distance required to set the forward bedrail,

another strip of painter's tape was carefully laid down. The base of the hitch was set in the bedrails so it could be lined up in the exact location where the holes were to be drilled through the bed. Remember to measure twice, as the placement of the bedrails is very critical.

Before drilling, the left and right frame brackets are positioned and the

(10) The $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch bit must be centered before enlarging the hole in the truck bed for the bracket bolts. (11) To prevent rust, vacuum up the metal flakes from the truck bed. (12) Demco devised a clever plate-and-nut-assembly for the bedrail bolts.



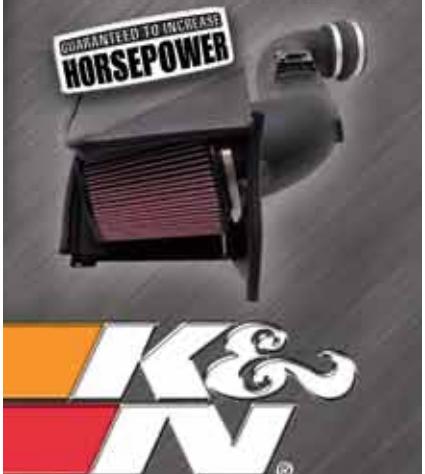


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bolts hand-tightened. It's not necessary to remove the rear tires; however, we did to gain a little better access to the truck frame when mounting the brackets. Always use wheel chocks and jack stands when removing tires from the truck.

Using a $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch drill bit, the initial holes were drilled through the bedrails and slots in the frame brackets. There's some blind drilling here, so be sure to check the position of the small drill bit to make certain that the hole is centered in the frame bracket.

After drilling the final size hole through the bedrails and the frame bracket, the shims, washers and spacers were installed as instructed, and the four bolts torqued to 170 ft-lbs after tightening to spec all the bolts holding the brackets to the truck frame. All the bolts were double-checked for safety.

With the hitch base firmly in place, the pivot head was mounted. It's a relatively easy step, but there is some weight to contend with. The outrigger is installed to stabilize the rear of the hitch base. This is simply a bracket that sits firmly against the bed of the truck. The outrigger is designed to distribute the pin weight as the hitch slides rearward.

The final step was to adjust the rails on the pivot head so that the kingpin box fits tightly when the trailer was hitched up. This measurement is critical; there cannot be any play between the kingpin box/capture plate and the pivot head. Remove the lube plate, if previously installed on the kingpin box; it will interfere with the function of the locking jaws in the pivot head.

(13) Only one hole on each frame bracket needed enlarging. (14) To use the existing holes in the truck frame, Demco supplies unique plate-and-bolt assemblies to help reduce the number of holes that need to be drilled, saving time on the installation. (15) For those hard-to-reach places, Demco provides a fish wire to pull the bolt into place. (16) The outrigger at the rear of the hitch-base assembly is designed to support the weight of the kingpin as the pivot head slides rearward. (17) Before installing the pivot-head assembly, the two bumper stops in the hitch-base assembly are installed. (18) After setting the pivot-head assembly into place, the large pivot pin is installed.



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(19) With the pivot head in place, the release handle is installed with the supplied nut and bolt. (20 and 21) Carefully measure the pin box and then set the guides on the pivot head for a tight fit.

Test Drive

Backing into the kingpin was a breeze. The jaws snapped shut without a problem. Before the tailgate of the truck was closed, we carefully inspected the jaws, making sure they were securely in place. Demco designed the release handle in such a way that the safety lock pin cannot be inserted into the handle if the jaws are not locked in place.

Pulling forward while turning

sharply, the Autoslide pivoted freely and slid rearward seamlessly. In an open area of a large parking lot, we purposely jackknifed the truck and fifth-wheel. The front of the trailer missed the cab of the truck by a good 10 inches. Without the Autoslide, the truck and trailer would have collided. Venturing out into the streets, not one hair-raising noise came from the hitch. We were also able to maneuver through some pretty tight corners that

definitely would not be possible with the standard fifth-wheel hitch. The overall quality of this fifth-wheel hitch is impressive; it's made in the United States with American steel. The hitch has a five-year warranty and retails for \$1,483; the capture plate sells for \$129.

Demco recommends inspecting the Autoslide hitch before each trip. Remove the four screws on the two gear covers and inspect the system for any excess wear. Inspect all fasteners

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(22) Demco offers a custom capture plate for MOR/ryde pin boxes. (23) The Demco pivot head slides comfortably to the rear when making turns. (24) The Autoslide hitch makes for improved turning with exceptional quiet handling and allows for plenty of clearance when turning corners or backing into a site.

for tightness at least every 2,000 miles of operation. Additionally, inspect the jaw bars for freedom of movement and proper operation before each use. Demco recommends using white lithium grease to help prevent wear on the top plate surface.

Demco's Autoslide offers the luxury of a sliding hitch without the headaches and inconveniences that were once associated with mechanical sliding assemblies — so there are no worries when towing with shortbed trucks. 

Demco
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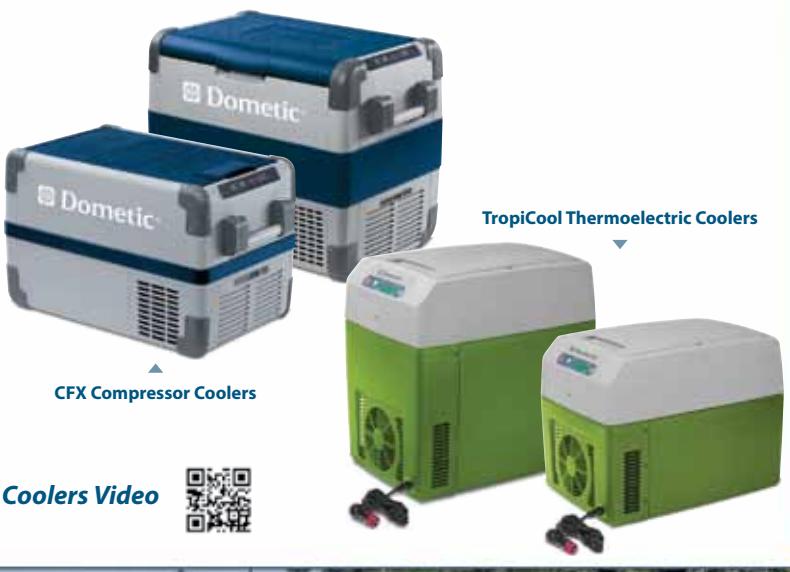
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