

SHORTBED SOLUTION

PULLRITE'S NEW 16K SUPER-GLIDE HITCH TAKES THE GUESSWORK — AND FEAR — OUT OF MAKING SHARP TURNS WHEN TOWING A FIFTH-WHEEL

Text & photos by Jeff Johnston

It seems to be The RV Question of the Year: “Can I tow a fifth-wheel trailer with my short-bed pickup?” Yes you can, in many cases, but — and this is a big but — you have to choose the right hitch equipment. Pull-Rite’s new 16K SuperGlide hitch is a clean, elegant answer to the shortbed towing problem.

Cab-to-trailer clearance, or lack thereof, is what makes short-bed fifth-wheel trailer towing an issue. The fifth-wheel hitch pivot point is usually located directly over, or a couple of inches in front of, the rear axle. When the axle is less than four feet from the back of the cab (as with a shortbed truck), the trailer, which is 8 feet wide (more or less) can come into contact with the cab in a tight turn. As the trailer swings to the side, half of its width (or about four feet) is positioned ahead of the pivot point. Thus, it’s easy to smack into the cab. Extended pin boxes, which move the kingpin out ahead of the front wall of the trailer, are a partial answer to the dilemma, but they can still allow a trailer to impact the cab.

The manually adjusted hitches that



Cab to trailer interference would normally be an issue on a shortbed, fifth-wheel combo, but the SuperGlide slides back up to 14 inches when the truck turns a corner to provide the necessary clearance. The SuperGlide also includes a base plate that bolts onto the trailer’s pin box.

some manufacturers offer are another solution, but it’s incumbent on the driver to remember to unlatch the hitch and move it back into turning-manuever position, then move it back

up for towing, after every such turn. The SuperGlide hitch accomplishes this movement automatically, each time the truck and trailer turn a corner. Aside from being much more convenient, this feature also eliminates the possibility of the driver forgetting the hitch movement procedure, and thereby prevents the potential for costly damage to the truck and/or trailer.

SUPERGLIDE 16K NUTS AND BOLTS

PullRite has had its larger 20K SuperGlide on the market for several years, but its relatively high cost (\$2,995) and 325-pound weight deterred some potential buyers. Many RVers didn't need a hitch to accommodate a 20,000-pound trailer, so PullRite developed its downsized 16,000-pound-rated 16K model. The 16K version is priced at \$1,899 (msrp) and weighs about 242 pounds, so it's less of a dead-weight load on the pickup, and is easier to remove/install as needed. In addition, the 16K breaks down into several manageable components, including the head, base and rails, so it's possible for one person to wrangle it in and out of the truck if necessary.

PullRite uses the same type of mounting pins and brackets for the 20K and 16K hitches. After removing the hitch and its mounting bars, a pin through the bed and down to the frame mounting bracket at each corner is removed via a twist/lift action, leaving the bed free for unobstructed cargo hauling.

The SuperGlide includes a baseplate that bolts to the trailer's pin box. This plate makes the trailer hitch lock securely to the SuperGlide hitch and prevents any pivoting at the hitch pin, which is vital for the SuperGlide to function properly.

Alternately, the entire SuperGlide hitch head pivots when the unit turns a corner. As the head turns, its mechanism causes the head to slide back up to 14 inches on a pair of tubular rails that is part of the base unit. As the truck returns to an in-line position relative to the trailer, the hitch slides back up to its original static position. This simple but effective sliding action is the crux of the SuperGlide's functionality. It reliably provides the clearance needed for fifth-wheel towing with a short-box truck.

PullRite also offers a SuperGlide 16K model for the Ford F-150 SuperCrew shortbed truck that's available on special order. It provides 22 inches of travel to accommodate the truck's trim 28-inch axle-to-cab dimension.

ON THE ROAD

We test-drove a truck and trailer with the SuperGlide head installed and were very impressed with the product. The truck, an unusual combination of a Ford

F-350 Crew Cab dualie with a short bed, was hitched to a Carriage Lite LS231 trailer with an 8-foot 5-inch-wide body. Half the trailer body is 50.5 inches wide and the truck was 40 inches from axle to cab — a sure-fire combination for towing disaster with a standard hitch.

First, we backed up to a 90-degree jackknife position and measured the cab-to-trailer clearance. We had approximately 2½ inches of space between the two, which isn't much, but a miss is good as a mile, as they say. It's not often that a driver really needs to use a full 90-degree jackknife, so that clearance was enough for most average driving situations.

The SuperGlide is built with approximately a 32-degree (or 16-degrees either side of center) "flat zone" in which no fore-and-aft sliding movement takes place. This allows the operator to make lane changes and other frequently encountered minimal turning movements without a lot of excess fore-and-aft trailer shuffling. The SuperGlide works like any other hitch with a fixed, non-sprung head, in that it locks the trailer firmly in place and transmits certain types of road shocks between truck and trailer. In short, no surprises. The hitch head is a standard PullRite design that also incorporates side-to-side tilt for hitching and operational flexibility.

Turn a corner, and the hitch slides smoothly back; the movement is imperceptible to the driver. Getting over the fear of cab-to-trailer interference is the hardest part of using the SuperGlide. Once the driver relaxes and realizes that yes, the trailer will clear the cab every time, the driving becomes more fun.

PullRite makes mounting kits for all popular short-bed pickups sold today, and custom mounts are also possible.

Given the popularity of short-bed pickups today, it makes sense that many such truck owners would want to tow fifth-wheel trailers. The new SuperGlide 16K hitch makes it possible to do so in a comfortable, reliable way that adds relaxation and peace of mind to the towing process. **TL**

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