

RV Clinic & Performance

by Jeff Johnston & Ken Freund

Shortbed Fifth-Wheel Hitch

We're considering purchasing a fifth-wheel trailer, but we have a shortbed 1999 Ford F-250 SuperCab with a V-10 engine, which is rated to tow 11,300 pounds. We're planning on buying a trailer with an approximate gross vehicle weight rating (gvwr) of 9,000 pounds.

I read some interesting comments in the "forums" section online (rv.net/forum), but I still don't know whether I should buy the SuperGlide or a manual slider hitch. There are too many different experiences described for me to draw one conclusion. Obviously, the basic question is "Is it worth the cost?" To better answer this for myself, I would like to know: Is it even possible to hit the cab on a shortbed truck with the trailer while maneuvering in traffic, or those places where it's very inconvenient or even dangerous to be getting out of the truck to operate a manual hitch? Campgrounds are no problem since that's an expected activity, but streets...!

JON TINSLEY
MILTON, FLORIDA

■ We haven't discussed this in awhile, Jon, so this is a good time to revisit the situation.

If it were my truck and trailer, I'd absolutely buy the SuperGlide automatic-sliding hitch. Why? It's extremely easy, convenient and safe to use. No matter how hard I'd try, chances are good that on some trip when I'm a bit absent-minded, or the weather is bad, or I'm a bit tired, I'll turn into a gas station or make some such tight-turning maneuver and forget to move a manual sliding hitch, turn sharper than I'd planned and wham! I have an expensive repair bill for my truck and/or trailer. Thinking about all the other details involved with an RVing jaunt, I'd also get tired, really quickly, of having to get out and manually

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operate the hitch slider — twice — for each occurrence of a prospective sharp turn.

If you're sharp enough to remember to work the manual hitch every time, and you can eyeball a situation accurately enough to estimate all possible sharp turns in a given driving situation, and you don't mind the hassle, then the manual hitch is a fine, functional solution.

A fifth-wheel most certainly can strike the cab of a shortbed truck. The average fifth-wheel, with an 8-foot-wide body, is at least 4 feet from the hitch pin to the edge of the body — sometimes more. A shortbed truck, with a 6-foot bed as an example, may have the hitch pivot point approximately 3 feet back from the cab wall. Doing the math, it's easy to see how it doesn't even take a full 90-degree turn to cause cab-to-trailer contact.

As for whether the trailer will hit the cab while maneuvering in traffic, that depends. In a highway-driving situation where the angle between the truck and trailer doesn't vary a great deal during lane changes or when rounding a curve, probably not. But sooner or later you need to take an exit with a 90-degree turn at its end, or if it's a sweeper turn, you subsequently need to turn a corner in town, or into a market, where parking-lot maneuvering with a trailer calls for sharp turns, or the gas station has a tighter exit route than you'd planned ... you get the idea.

I don't need the worry or wondering. I'd stick with the automatic sliding hitch. —J.J.

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for more information...

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