

# TRAILERS ON THE JOB SITE



The author uses two of these utility trailers to organize his tools and hardware — one for framing and one for finish.

TRAILERS ARE TOPS  
WHEN IT COMES TO  
ORGANIZING TOOLS  
AND HARDWARE —  
OR FOR JUST  
PLAIN HAULING

BY BENJAMIN PARTRICK

It's Friday afternoon and the family wants to go camping. It sounds great, but there's a problem: With all of the gear you'll need for the trip, you really should take your pickup truck. If you do, you'll have to remove the rat's nest of tools, supplies, and demolition debris. The ladder rack or custom toolbox may have to go. You'll have to find a place to store it all, then put everything back together early Monday morning.

If this sounds familiar, there may be a construction trailer in your future. Trailers permit a clean separation between your personal and private lives. Trailers stay on the job, along with your tools, supplies, and a whole lot of dirt. This frees up your pickup for weekend use.

Also, unlike vans and bigger trucks, trailers have very few moving parts and last a long time. Why maintain several engines when you only need one? You can trade in your pickup every few years and keep the trailer. And with the additional storage a trailer can provide, you might even find room in your garage for the lawn mower.

Trailers aren't for everybody; they're really only practical for crews that stay on a job for at least a day or two. If you do a lot of small

jobs that take you to several locations a day, then the hassles of dragging the trailer around may not be worth the trouble. A panel van is probably a better option. Trailers also aren't appropriate for high-crime areas. I had \$3,000 worth of small tools expropriated from a trailer by a thief with a good set of bolt cutters. Replacement-value insurance saved the day.

## The Organizers: Utility Trailers

My company uses two utility trailers, made by Wells Cargo, for storing and organizing tools and small supplies: One trailer is set up for a framing crew and the other for the finish carpenters. We also have a flatbed trailer for heavy work.

On one side of the framing trailer, bins are organized two-deep on shelves. These hold the most frequently used fasteners, small parts, and other supplies. Space above the shelves is provided for longer items. An air hose reel (part No. A4Z934 from W.W. Grainger, 333 Knightsbridge Pkwy., Lincolnshire, IL 60069; 800/323-0620) stores up to 300 feet of  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch hose, which is fed via guide rollers through a hole in the floor, then routed to a guide arm (part No. 157-6057 from



The framing trailer is loaded with standard carpentry tools for a framing crew, including a contractor's table saw (on its side, at left) and a two-horse compressor. The air hose — 300 feet of it — feeds from its reel along the underside of the trailer to a removable guide arm extending from the end (inset).



the same company) mounted below the rear bumper. The guide arm is actually a replacement part for a Speedaire retractable hose reel of the sort found in service stations. It can be clamped in several different locations, depending on where the hose is needed. In the morning, a worker simply grabs a nailer off the shelf with one hand, the end of the hose with the other, and heads off for work.

The other side of the trailer includes a workbench for small jobs like changing saw blades, shelving for tools, and labeled buckets for supplies that won't fit in the bins. An adapted garden hose reel contains 125 feet of No. 8 flexible extension cord to power the trailer's four outlets. The outlets supply power to a two-horse compressor, bench grinder, and cordless tool charger.

In the trim trailer, frequently used shop tools are stored near the trailer's side door. Shelves with plastic bins contain the multitude of small supplies needed to finish a house. Hand tools remain in toolboxes that can be easily carried into the house. The trim trailer has its own two-horsepower compressor, which is adequate for several finish nailers or a spray gun.

The bin system creates a specific place for all of your frequently used supplies, and can help to limit trips to suppliers, a priority for all builders. With an empty, labeled bin of galvanized 8s shouting at you, you are going to realize that you need to stock up long before it's time to nail down that deck.

**Features to look for.** Utility trailers are available in a range of sizes, and with several options and accessories to choose from. Each of my company's two utility trailers has interior dimensions of 15 feet 9 inches by 6 feet 9 inches, and can carry a payload of 5,750 pounds. They cost about \$4,000 each, including double rear doors, a single side door, a ladder rack, and a roof vent (the inside of the trailer can get quite hot in the summer; the roof vent keeps the temperature down without compromising security).

If you're going to put heavy items on the upper shelves, it's important to have a strong interior wall lining to stiffen the frame against racking and twisting. I special-ordered my trailers with a 5/8-inch plywood interior lining glued and screwed to the steel framing with construction adhesive. To prevent the walls from pushing in and out, I interrupted the shelves every 2 or 3 feet with 3/4-inch plywood side panels fastened securely to the wall lining and to the floor.

### The Workhorses: Flatbeds

Our flatbed trailer is in constant use. It carries heavy equipment to

job sites, hauls building materials, serves as a dumpster, and absorbs much of the wear and tear that would otherwise be borne by a pickup.

Because flatbeds are pretty simple, you may find (as I did) that someone has set up shop locally to manufacture them (look in the Yellow Pages under "trailers"). If you do an occasional roof tearoff or want to be able to make substantial materials runs, get a flatbed that can carry at least two or three tons. Ours cost \$2,000 and is 16 feet long — just about right for carrying pump jacks and most lumber. It came with a treated wood bed, and we built our own removable sides, front, and tailgate. You can also get flatbeds with ramps for hauling small tractors and the like.

### Truck Requirements

Though it's possible to order a compact truck that can tow up to 6,000 pounds, I recommend a full-size three-quarter-ton pickup with an eight-cylinder engine. You'll also need a hitch with a rating to match your trailer when it's fully loaded and, in all likelihood, an electric brake setup. If you're buying a new truck, I would also recommend a heavy-duty radiator and a transmission/engine oil cooler — a combination known in the truck business as a "towing package."

So if you don't move around too much or live in a high-crime area, a pickup truck with one or more trailers might work for you. Ours have served us well, and once purchased and set up, have cost us little. The crew appreciates the easy access to tools and supplies, and I appreciate the savings in time, money, and aggravation.

"Want to go camping for the weekend, Dad?"

"You bet! Load up the truck." ■

*Benjamin Partrick is a building contractor in the Syracuse, N.Y., area. Photos by the author.*

### Utility Trailer Manufacturers

Car Mate  
Sales Department  
P.O. Box 155  
Leeper, PA 16233  
800/733-8856

Haulmark Industries  
P.O. Box 8  
McAdoo, PA 18237  
800/800-1664

Pace American  
Sales Department  
11550 Harter Dr.  
Middlebury, IN 46540  
800/247-5767

Wells Cargo Inc.  
P.O. Box 728  
Elkhart, IN 46515  
800/348-7553



*A workbench along one side of the framing trailer holds a heavy-duty vise and a grinder, with bucket storage underneath and tool cubbies above (left). On the other side, bins hold frequently used hardware and a large reel holds the air hose (below, left).*



*The finish trailer has bins for the many small pieces of hardware needed to finish a house, as well as toolboxes full of hand tools. The air vent in the ceiling provides summertime ventilation and much needed light to the dark interior.*



*The author's flatbed trailer carries heavy equipment, building materials, and debris, and can even haul small vehicles.*