Smoother SAILING

MOR/ryde's rubber pin box helps cushion the fifth-wheel ride

Text & photos by Chuck Campbell

Fifth-wheel trailers are usually pretty stable as towables, which is one reason they're the favorites of RVers who like to engage in long-term travel and camping. However, these flagships of the open road are not always without irritating operational idiosyncrasies that are often accepted as a natural by-product of the fifth-wheel towing experience.

More often than not, tow vehicles that lack some sort of system to dampen forces in the hitch- and pin-box area can frequently experience jerking and fore-and-aft or vertical chucking actions when traversing damaged and uneven highway surfaces.

Among the most prevalent culprits in causing grief to the pin box are simple acceleration or deceleration movements, interstate-freeway expansion joints, railroad tracks and cupped lane surfaces caused by constant 18-wheeler traffic. Throw in a pothole or two, and you have plenty of aggravating impacts directed at the hitch platform. Excessive hitch-pin jolting can create a host of annoying problems, from frazzled nerves of tow-vehicle occupants to shaken up and damaged cargo in the trailer. Cumulative structural damage to a coach's framework and components can also be a negative by-product of prolonged road abuse received directly through the pin box, especially when towing with a medium-duty truck. Depending on types of highways encountered and the number of miles traveled, stress and damage can also occur to the actual hitch hardware itself in more severe cases.

MOR/ryde International's new rubber pin-box system is a simple but effective solution to ease unwanted hitch-pin hammering. To accomplish this, the system uses the company's proprietary shear-spring technology inside the pin box, which is essentially a

flexible, rectangular rubber billet the size of a small overnight bag.

The MOR/ryde pin-box system we used (part no. RPB-72-7910) weighed in at 120 pounds, which is about double the weight of 60-pound, stock OEM hardware. It is built with the same or higher weight tolerances than the equipment it replaces. Furthermore, at an MSRP of $795, the rubber-pin setup is less expensive than more technologically involved remedies like air-ride hitches.

Swapping out an existing pin box for the MOR/ryde system is a quick exchange process that can easily be accomplished by even novice mechanics. All that is necessary are a few basic tools that include appropriate-size wrenches and sockets, a torque wrench capable of 300 FT-LB, alignment pins (a couple of heavy-duty screwdrivers work just fine) and a bit of help lifting and temporarily holding the heavier pin box in place after the old one is removed. Under normal circumstances, the entire process should take no more than one hour.

To take off the old pin box, simply remove a total of 12 bolts. Next, the replacement pin box, which has holes that match the old part's bolt pattern, is raised and temporarily pinned in place by inserting two metal screwdrivers in a couple of opposing bolt holes. The original bolts are then re-inserted, the nuts tightened per the included torque chart and you're off and running.

MOR/ryde asserts that its rubber pin box has a full range of horizontal planar motion, with 1½ inches of play fore and aft, and side-to-side or lateral movement of ¾-inch per side. According to MOR/ryde, the system's rubber shear spring damps the trailer's harsh reactions to road surfaces and absorbs most, if not all, of the jerkiness or porpoising so commonly encountered with fifth-wheel operation.

To test the new pin box that was now firmly attached to a 37-foot Jayco Legacy fifth-wheel, we hooked it to a 2003 Ford F-550 Super Duty truck and took it for a spin on an expressway that receives a large share of daily commuter and commercial traffic, and its highway surface dramatically attests to this fact.

Prior to our trial run with the new pin box, we towed the Jayco over the same course with the stock hardware in place, giving us a baseline from which to compare ride improvement — or lack thereof — after the MOR/ryde pin box had been installed.

Due to the fact that our tow vehicle was already equipped with an air-ride rear suspension, the combination towed relatively smoothly with the exception of hitch jerking as we traversed distressed stretches of pavement and numerous pot-holed surfaces caused by constant wear and tear. Taking off from a dead stop and braking for signals and other situations also created some pin banging, which is par for a standard fifth-wheel hitch-and-pin arrangement.

Once we set off with the new MOR/ryde equipment in place, our towing experience took on an entirely new dimension. When accelerating from a stop or braking sharply, we could feel a slight bit of give-and-take in the seat of our pants as the pin box smoothly adjusted fore and aft to compensate for the adverse forces experienced in this area. We soon became accustomed to this gentle motion, and it was a vast improvement over previous unfriendly impacts received with the stock hardware.

As we coursed down the highway at a brisk clip, changed lanes, hit expansion joints and a variety of other pavement anomalies, the MOR/ryde rubber pin box absorbed most highway insults with aplomb. It was quite remarkable what the simple retrofit of a flexible pin box achieved in improving the overall driving experience with our combination.

For the money, MOR/ryde's rubber pin box is an excellent first step in taming unruly fifth-wheel-hitch shenanigans. The system does little to absorb vertical impacts more commonly handled by air-assisted hitches and suspensions, but it does a remarkable job with the fore-and-aft clanking inherent in most fifth-wheel towing. TL