



## 2009 Open Range 385RLS

By Howard J. Elmer

### **This 5th wheel trailer has plenty of room to spare.**

**T**he Open Range RV Co. is a new manufacturer of fifth wheels, so if you haven't heard of them, it would be understandable. However, the principal of the company is anything but new to the business. President Randy Graber worked for Newmar, KZ and Keystone before starting Open Range last fall. And while well grounded in the business of building RVs, what he says he really likes to do is innovate.

Well, a hot July day found me in Graber's newest design, having just come to market, looking for these innovations. The test trailer (385 RLS) I picked up was a fifth wheel floorplan with four slides including an extra deep one containing a large flat-screen TV, entertainment cen-

tre and optional electric fireplace.

It's interesting to note Open Range model numbers refer to the square footage of its units, not the length. The reasoning is that all Open Range RVs are 100-inch-wide bodies and the slides tend to be 46 inches in depth, deeper than most, so simply looking at the length figures is misleading. This model offers 385 square feet of floor space.

But, in addition to a stretched floor space, Open Range also cuts overall weight by using a five-sided welded aluminium superstructure. This puts aluminium in the walls and floors, while in the roof, galvanized steel truss rafters are punched to reduce weight. Sandwiching the two-inch wall studs is a five-layer insulated

package finished with laminated high gloss exterior walls. Even the plywood used for the subfloor is of the "Plylite" brand variety.

These efforts net the Open Range a dry weight of 10,560 pounds, even with four slideouts. What else is noteworthy is Open Range has opted to go with an all-electric steel cable pulley system to operate its slides. With this system, the two things I noticed right away were that the slides moved without any tipping and that the cable system does away with heavy steel support beams under each slide. The motors are located behind a decorative (semi-round) fascia on top of each slide. How will these cables and pulleys fair long-term? Who

knows, but at least the mechanisms are easily accessed and there is no hydraulic oil to contend with.

As a comparison, I pulled up three random fifth wheels made by other manufacturers and compared dry weights in the same length range (plus or minus a foot). These units are what I found first: Coachmen Wyoming 38-foot, 500 pounds more; Fleetwood Quantum 38-foot, 1,000 pounds more; Forest River, Cedar Creek 39-foot, 2,200 pounds more. They are by no means the only ones out there. But, on the other hand, I did not find any lighter than the test unit in my random search either.

When Graber says he thinks of himself as an innovator, I take that to mean he likes detail, by which I mean, visually, there are a multitude of small touches, fixtures and finishes that stand out throughout the unit.

For example, entering the test unit, the kitchen layout and design strikes the visitor first with its size (large L-shaped counter with covered sink is five feet long) and unique features such as the overhead hanging pots and pan rack. As well, the built-in wine rack and other metal scroll work is lit up by the flush-mounted pot lights from the woodwork above that mimics the counter size below.

The wood-fronted two-door fridge, three-burner stove, oven and overhead microwave are set in one of the other slides that opens the kitchen up and also creates access to the full-height pantry/cupboards on the right. It's this slide that really adds space to the kitchen.

But it's the rear living room space that makes this unit ideal for the couple who intend to spend the winter away. The entertainment centre and fireplace is a focal point,



The large L-shaped kitchen has a multitude of unique features such as the overhead pots and pan rack along with a built in wine rack.

## Specifications

### 2009 Open Range 385RLS Fifth Wheel

Exterior length:	37 feet, six inches
Exterior height:	153 inches
Exterior width:	100 inches
GVWR:	13,940 pounds
Dry weight:	10,560 pounds
Water heater:	10 gallons gas/electric
Fresh water:	85 gallons
Grey water:	90 gallons
Black water:	45 gallons
LP gas:	80 pounds
Furnace:	40,000 BTU
Tire size:	16 inches
<b>Base price:</b>	<b>\$53,311.50</b>

### Options

16-inch Wheels and Tires:	\$413.00
Pre-wired for Second AC Unit:	\$413.00
Dual LP w/slide trays:	\$273.00
Dual pane windows:	\$1,113.00
Rear ladder:	\$140.00
Power rear stabilizer jack:	\$308.00
Central Vacuum:	\$413.00
<b>Price as tested:</b>	<b>\$57,077.50</b>

Test Unit provided by Can-Am RV Centre, London, ON.

See ad on page 39.



Above: A slideout propane rack on either side of the trailer is a very smart feature.

Left: The bedroom has a king-size bed with storage underneath, large wardrobe, and 2 windows that open for cross ventilation.

but the opposing slides open up a large living space in between while still having the pair of reclining chairs and centre table in the rear with the picture window — an ideal setting for several people visiting.

The fold-out couch in this slide is of the fold-out metal frame variety. This is something I'd hope the manufacturer would change soon as there are several excellent inflatable beds on the market that avoid the "bar-in-the-back" pain that comes with the old style fold-outs. On the other hand, guests rarely linger when that's their only sleeping choice.

Also of note is the amount of glass in the unit — double pane tinted windows are part of the four-season living package that also includes a 31,000 BTU furnace, vented attic, heated holding tanks, enclosed underbelly, heated storage and an R-28 roof, R-21 floor, R-9 sidewalls.

The bedroom in this trailer is dominated by a king-size bed and a forward wardrobe that's deep enough to allow the use of real hangers. The head of the bed fits into the fourth slideout and it has windows on each side that open for cross-ventilation. While there is no space for night tables, there is a small shelf on either

side for books, glasses or what ever else you might knock over in the night. Under the bed is storage and twin gas-pressurized supports make it easy to lift.

There is a nice open feeling to this space thanks to the sliding French doors (which have large glass panes, but also shades) that, when open, remove the bathroom divider. This way the large corner shower, sink and vanity become one with the standard bedroom wardrobe, provided the sliding door at the stairs is closed. The open shower has a skylight and a moulded shower seat. The toilet (plastic) is separated by a hard door and has its own fan.

Outside, Open Range has offered up a few surprises as well. First, there is a standard King-Pin stabilizer jack, an aftermarket item for many RV-ers. The best thing, though, is that it's attached to the unit and swings up to store out of the way. There is also a Carefree power awning in the package. Just be aware it does not have a wind/rain sensor, so close it at night. The rear automotive-style bumper has some give — enough to perhaps forgive the odd mistake here and there.

Pass-thru storage is ample and I

liked the fact the wiring, mechanicals and plumbing were separated by a sliding partition behind which things were pretty neatly arranged. This is where you would also find the additional outlet to the central vacuum and also a fitting and outlets that let you bring the TV outside.

A feature that struck me as smart was the slideout propane racks on either side. The key to this is that the system uses typical 20 pound tanks that are easily exchangeable in thousands of locations — no waiting for fill-ups, just swap out the tanks.

There are some price concessions on the Open Range, but they are small ones (such as the purchase of a second AC unit, if needed) easily offset by slick innovations. And fit and finish on the unit is good, showing a particular dedication to quality. I hope they keep that up. **RV**

*Howard J. Elmer of PowerSports Media Services is a Canadian automotive journalist, truck writer and RVing specialist.*