

# Instant Trailer

Just add water, load the refrigerator, and the Air OPUS Off-Road is ready to tackle any backcountry adventure

The silence was broken occasionally by the yips and howls of coyotes or the low hum of the refrigerator compressor kicking on. I was sitting in a camp chair, my dog by my side, watching the last of a sunset with a pink and orange sky from atop a mesa overlooking California's Sierra Madre range, the Air OPUS Off-Road folding trailer behind me. In less than five minutes, the OPUS had self-inflated

via an onboard air compressor, and within half an hour, I had set up the trailer, with its two double-size beds and seating for six, my belongings and bedding tucked inside, and had dinner on the stove.

The last time I camped at the semi-remote Songdog Ranch in the Cuyama Valley — where cattle outnumber people — was many years ago, and I was on a motorcycle



with a tent and sleeping bag strapped to the back, and dinner made on a backpacker camp stove. This time was different. Traveling with the OPUS, I felt like I was cooking in a gourmet kitchen, with pasta boiling on one burner, marinara on another and a teakettle set on a third on the outdoor kitchen's huge four-burner range.

The OPUS Off-Road is built tough, clearly with the adventurous camper in mind. It doesn't just look rugged, it *is* rugged, featuring a galvanized-steel chassis supporting an aluminum frame, independent trailing-arm suspension with twin shock absorbers, 12.4 inches of ground clearance, a 700-pound-rated side-pivoting cargo rack for kayaks, bicycles and other

toys, Mad-Max-style all-terrain tires, and a rock guard with a netting barrier in front of metal racks holding jerricans bookending a 5-gallon LP-gas cylinder.

Completing the Off-Road package is a Lock 'N' Roll articulating trailer coupler with three-way, 360-degree rotation for up-and-down and side-to-side movement. The hitch worked so well that we almost forgot the trailer was being towed, and there was no stop-and-pull jerking when going over speed bumps. Getting to the top of the mesa required going over a large dip in the sand and climbing a dirt hill, all of which was a breeze towing the OPUS. The OPUS has a spare tire attached on the back and a hand brake on the A-frame to lock the wheels. This type of brake is not common on conventional trailers, so remembering to release it before taking off took some acclimation.

Packed down and ready for travel, the OPUS is less than 5 feet high and has a gross vehicle weight rating under 4,000 pounds, so it can be towed by many light trucks and SUVs. Open up the dual-fold lid, though, and like a Transformers action figure, it morphs into something completely different: a Conestoga-wagon-style trailer with a 7½-foot interior height, "bedrooms" with 50-by-68-inch mattresses at each end, a U-shaped dinette that can seat six or sleep two, a 30-amp/120-volt AC electric hookup, and two stainless-steel on-board 20-gallon freshwater tanks with on-demand 12-volt electric pumps for the outdoor shower and kitchen sink.

Then there's the outdoor kitchen with its precinct limited only by the next campsite. Besides unlimited space, the kitchen keeps cooking smells and splatters outside so you can go wild with the bacon and garlic. The drawer-style setup, with a stainless range, prep area/drain rack and sink, pulls out 4½ feet from the side of the trailer. An adjustable LED light is to the left of the range and a 14-by-19-inch counter extension with support legs is to the right. The four-burner range with metal grates is big enough to make chef Gordon Ramsay smile.

Behind the kitchen in its own compartment is a top-loading Dometic 50-liter (1.77-cubic-foot) refrigerator-



**(Top)** Expansive surround windows bring the outdoors in. The front bed is behind the six-seater dinette, while the back bed is a step up to the left of the entry door. **(Above)** The outdoor kitchen sports a huge four-burner range, stainless sink and a cutlery drawer.

freezer (an optional 63-liter model is available). The refrigerator is in a drawer on heavy-duty glides; a 12-volt DC fan keeps the compartment cool. The Wi-Fi-enabled refrigerator is set up for a smartphone app to adjust and monitor the temperature, and it even has a lid-open alert.

The Air OPUS's self-inflating canopy has five air crossbeams and four lateral ones, and each one has a three-layer internal plastic bladder and two outer protective layers. The compressor pumps air into the center beam, which then distributes air to the other beams via two-way valves. When it's time to pack up, the user opens five outside valves, and the canopy deflates in minutes. The air beams can be isolated with the two-way valves; if one tube fails, for



example, you can shut off the valve to that beam so the whole thing doesn't deflate.

We discovered this on our first night out when one of the valves in the air beam over the rear bed had been tampered with — our test unit had been set up at multiple RV shows, and somewhere along the way, a valve had been turned so it created a slow leak. OPUS is so confident about its product that, should there be a failure, the company will send out a new air beam overnight, which it claims can be replaced by the owner in less than 10 minutes. For us, fortunately, the issue was resolved over the phone, and we enjoyed several more camping adventures sans any problems.

When set up, the living area is covered by an arched heavy-duty poly-cotton canvas that resists mildew, and there's a zipped entry door and fold-out step. While the trailer is inflating, you can work on exterior setup — such as the stabilizing jacks and kitchen, and hooking up water and LP-gas. Once the OPUS is inflated, some light assembly is required inside to put up the folding table and place the back cushions for the dinette, which piece together like a simple puzzle, as well as readying a few other things (if opted for) like the 20-liter 120-volt AC portable microwave (\$149). The bedrooms at each end are ready to go, each with its own zipped inner tent to reduce condensation, add extra insulation in cold weather and for privacy. We preferred to keep the table outside, where it was more useful for us, plus we liked having the extra floor space inside.

Airflow and interior brightness can be customized via multiple windows in the living area, bed-ends and overhead. Each window has two layers — screen and heavy plastic — so

**AIR OPUS OFF-ROAD**

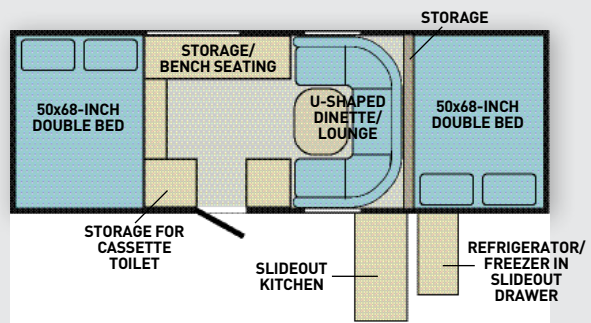


ILLUSTRATION BY DOUG PAUJIN

you can let in sunlight, for instance, without letting in cold air. Additionally, the entire kitchen-side wall can be opened up — OPUS' version of a French door. An optional Inflating Tent Full Awning (\$1,995) with air beams can be attached, which is basically an add-on room.

The large windows overhead, or skylights, are topped with an exterior removable Tropical Roof that blocks direct sunlight. If you want to leave the Tropical Roof off, that's best decided before inflating the OPUS, or it would have to be semi-deflated to reach the buckled attachments or require the use of a ladder. With the Tropical Roof in place and the skylights open, air can pass through under it, creating airflow from the top (presuming there's a breeze), which I could feel while lying in bed. With the roof off, you're privy to spectacular stargazing with the four skylights, depending on where you're



The Air OPUS Off-Road is built for serious off-the-beaten-path camping with its independent trailing-arm suspension and twin shock absorbers (far left) and Lock 'N' Roll articulating coupler with three-way movement (left). (Below) Next stop: Southern California's Zuma Beach for some standup paddleboarding. The side-pivoting cargo rack is rated for 700 pounds and lifts easily out of the way when setting up the OPUS.



camped. And the large windows at each end of the beds supply spectacular views of the night — and day — sky.

Inside, there's a simplicity to the living area, featuring vinyl flooring (with a metal base) and white particle-board benches with plentiful storage that double as seating and places to set things. To the left of the entry door is storage where the optional cassette toilet (\$199) can be housed. Cream-colored leatherette cushions with red piping make up the spacious U-shaped dinette (called a club lounge by OPUS), which can seat six adults. Two of us could stretch out lounge-style on comfortable cushions that offer good back support. Several of the benches that make up the dinette can be accessed from the top or the side to get to the storage.

Side rails are built into two benches to brace the table during travel and to convert the dinette into a third bed. I found the dinette's cushions to be more supportive than the ones on the double beds, which were made of high-density foam; a memory-foam-mattress upgrade is an option (\$750). For convenience, mesh hanging pockets are provided that are large enough to keep water bottles, an iPad and magazines.

To access the front bed, you have to step onto and over those lovely cream-colored dinette cushions. Parallel to the front bed and running the entire length is a convenient storage bin with a cup-holder and a GFCI-protected 120-volt AC outlet. You can spring for an optional two-cushion extension to make the front double bed into a king (\$299).

Three LED lights are set at floor level (one by the entry) and have dimmer switches. Overhead, just outside the bedrooms, are LED light strips on the ceiling with free-hanging on/off switches by the beds. While lying in bed, we needed more light for nighttime reading, so we brought along a light-weight clamp-on light.

The OPUS has two 12-volt, 100-amp-hour-rated batteries that the company claims can last four or five days for off-grid power. There's also an onboard battery charger. During a three-day outing without hookups, we had enough power to run the accessories and the

## SPECIFICATIONS

### AIR OPUS OFF-ROAD

Exterior Length (closed)	18' 4" with spare
Exterior Length (open)	21' 4"
Exterior Width (closed)	6' 4 3/4"
Exterior Height (closed)	4' 9"
Interior Width (main body)	6'
Interior Height	7' 6"
Construction	Steel chassis and aluminum frame; waterproof and mildew-resistant poly-cotton canvas; water-tight and dust-proof flanged seal when closed down; waterproof 10-ply floor
Freshwater Cap.	40 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	Optional 6-gal. containers
LP-gas Cap.	5 gal.
Water Heater	Portable tankless
Refrigerator	Dometic 2-way portable refrigerator-freezer
Furnace	16,000 Btu
Battery (2)	12-volt
On-Board Battery Charger	Marine, 2-Bank 8A
Tires	LT235/75R15
Suspension	Independent torsion with dual shock absorbers
Weight (freshwater and LP-gas full, portable shower on board)	3,460 lbs.
Hitch Weight	310 lbs.
GVWR	3,970 lbs.
GAWR	3,500 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	510 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$24,499
MSRP, As Tested	\$26,799
Basic Warranty	Two years

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16,000-Btu Atwood LP-gas furnace for several hours, which kept us toasty when temps dipped into the 40s one night. Owners need to be sure the furnace is turned off before packing down; we set a reminder on a cell phone just to be on the safe side.

When it comes to entertainment options in pop-up trailers, you'd be hard-pressed to beat the OPUS' offerings. A Roadstar remote stereo with DVD/CD/MP3/MPEG4/USB/SD card and two Sony speakers is standard. An optional Cinema Package (\$1,149) combines with the Roadstar stereo system to play movies through a 2½-hour-battery-powered AAXA Technologies P300 Neo Pico projector that's small enough to hold in your hand and attaches to a mini tripod. And — wait for it — a 60-by-70-inch screen pulls up from the base by



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the OPUS' rear bed. Bring out the popcorn, kick back on the club lounge and watch a movie from your home theater.

The portable tankless water heater (outdoor shower option \$650 includes floorless pop-up shower tent) with a handheld sprayer hangs on a swing-out rod by the spare tire and supplies 1.46 gallons of hot water per minute. This shower runs via the pump at the back and is hooked up to LP-gas. Combine the shower, tent and optional cassette toilet (\$199), and you have an outdoor bathroom. The shower tent is really lightweight, so it should be staked or tied down in case a breeze comes up; otherwise, you may find yourself naked and blushing in the great outdoors. The OPUS has an exterior 21-by-22-inch rollout storage bin with 18 inches of height where the shower and tent can be stored. Also in here is a hand pump in case the compressor should fail, so the OPUS can still be set up.

The British-Australian developer of the OPUS is so confident of the rugged and waterproof design that it has put the folding trailer through some crazy tests, which makes for some entertaining viewing on the company's website. One test shows a helicopter hovering over the trailer to test how it stands up to high winds, and another puts the OPUS through a five-minute spray-down using a fire hose. After viewing a video where the trailer is pounded by a baseball bat, we jokingly asked our OPUS contact if we could do that, too, and the reply was, "Have at it!"

With some practice, the Air OPUS can be set up and packed down by one person with little effort. When it's closed, rubber-covered metal flanges seal it to keep dirt and water out. Most importantly, you'll want to check, double-check and check again to be sure you haven't left something inside that you'll need before your next trip. There's also a 1,000-pound-rated tow hitch in back.

For less than \$27,000, the Air OPUS Off-Road offers the best of both camping worlds. Not only can you get to those remote campsites that you've been longing to reach — presuming your tow vehicle can handle it — but once you get there, you don't have to rough it. 🚐



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