

Travel Channel's

BIG TIME RV

by Cele Seldon



Reality television programming is all the rage these days. So it's no surprise that the RV industry has gotten into the game with several RV reality shows on a variety of channels. And one that has struck a chord with many RV owners (and wannabe owners) is *Big Time RV* on Travel Channel.

A joint project between Lazydays RV, Half Yard Productions, and Travel Channel, *Big Time RV* gives viewers an all-access pass into what goes into purchasing or renting an RV. From touring and testing every model of RV available, to the expert sales force and first-rate service center to the final decision, *Big Time RV* is there every step of the way until the customers drive their new vehicle off the lot.



All photos courtesy of Travel Channel

THE BIG IDEA

More people are RVing than ever. According to the most recent statistics from the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA), 8.5% of U.S. households owned an RV in 2011, up from 7.6% in 2001. That translates to 8.9 million RV households, with an estimate that the number in 2016 is closer to 9.3 million households. According to Kevin Broom, a spokesman with RVIA, the recent proliferation of RV programming reflects the enduring popularity of the RV lifestyle.

With that popularity in mind, Half Yard Productions, an award-winning production company specializing in character-driven reality series, documentary narratives, and historical specials reached out to Lazydays RV, the largest RV dealer in the U.S. with locations in Tampa, Florida, Tucson, Arizona, and Denver/Northern Colorado, to gauge their interest in the idea.

Then they set out to develop the concept, which was to highlight the diverse lifestyles of the RV community – from families to tailgaters, equestrians to motorsports enthusiasts, and entertainers to full-time RVers – while showcasing the innovative features and benefits of the various RV classes and brands that are available. Once they had their concepts fleshed out and their thoughts on paper, they pitched the idea to Travel Channel and began production in 2014, with the first season airing later that year and the third season scheduled to debut on August 14 at 9pm.

“Half Yard came to us with the concept for the show, and it was the perfect fit for Travel Channel,” says Courtney White, Senior Vice President of Programming for Travel Channel. “Our viewers love RV programming of all types, and *Big Time RV* has been a great addition to our lineup. It's the

House Hunters for RVs providing a glimpse inside some pretty incredible vehicles and an escape for those who may be dreaming about their own road trip adventure.”

The basic premise is that customers who are in the market to buy or rent an RV are filmed throughout their buying experience. From the time they walk onto the lot, to meeting their salesperson, touring and test driving the actual RVs in consideration, and the final decision of which vehicle they select, viewers have backstage passes. Half Yard works with the sales experts and their client databases to determine which stories and customers they choose for the show. Since Lazydays has so many customers and unique stories coming into their locations on a regular basis, there is always a diverse customer base in the market to purchase or rent an RV. “We look to feature a variety of people with fun and unique stories that our viewers will enjoy watching,” says White.

The salespeople that are featured on the show are part of the Lazydays team. John Lebbad, Lazydays Chief Marketing Officer, says, “We tend to pair our customers with the Lazydays sales experts who best fit their client's RV needs.” And, according to Greg Smith, Executive Producer with Half Yard Productions, the shows are definitely not scripted. “The show is about capturing the experience of buying and renting an RV. We meet the clients, find out what their needs are, then leave it up to the Lazydays sales experts to find them their dream RV.” Those same needs and wants, along with the customer's budgets, are usually the driving force on which type of RV will be featured in the show, from motorized classes (Class A, B, and C) to fifth wheels, travel trailers, and even rentals.



But what about the fascination with today's over-the-top RVs? Just like other home programming, people love to dream big. So many of the RVs featured on *Big Time RV* are totally tricked-out Class A models with every bell and whistle. But bigger and better isn't necessarily the mantra of *Big Time RV*. Overall the show's success appears to be based more on the strength of the stories within each episode. Some of the more memorable episodes have been centered around camper or small towable purchases. And although the flare of the big Class A RVs is a draw on some programs, the focus of *Big Time RV* is more on the story.

On average, they film three stories per week. Each story is then evaluated and grouped into categories that later help Half Yard determine how to best match the stories together to create the episodes. In total, it takes about six to eight days of filming per episode and then another seven to eight weeks of editing to create each show.



WHY THE RV FASCINATION?

From Smith's perspective, "Today's RVs offer all the comforts of home. There are no layovers and no airport security lines. Traveling by RV is traveling on your own terms. You go where you want to go, when you want to go, and you can bring with you pretty much anything you want." From Travel Channel's perspective, RVs give travelers a unique sense of freedom, adventure, and perspective. RVs give travelers the opportunity to see and experience what America has to offer in a way you can't necessarily get from other modes of transportation. "And who wouldn't want a vehicle with a built-in kitchen, bed, and bathroom to make it even more comfortable, luxurious, and fun," enthuses White.



STORIES FROM THE TRENCHES

Although many of the customer stories featured on *Big Time RV* are typical – such as wanting to travel during retirement, visit family, or simply upgrade from an existing camper – there have been some unique stories as well. Like the traveling magician couple who want to take their show on the road. Or, the roller derby team of 16 that need to be able to roll down the road with room for everyone. Or, the horse trainer who is looking for a ranch on wheels.

There are also some great stories from the salespeople. Like Jason Brunner, a 7-year veteran with Lazydays in Tampa, who almost lost a sale once he found out a potential customer was unemployed. Ends up, that customer was between careers. The customer was none other than John Runyan, retired nose guard for the Philadelphia Eagles, who was running for the New Jersey Senate and needed a motorhome for his campaign. Brunner believes to this day that Runyan won a seat in the Senate because of that motorhome.

Or the story from Tracy "Bama" Elliott, also from the Tampa Lazydays location, about the two women from Memphis that owned a cookie company and were looking for an RV that had a large enough kitchen to accommodate their baking needs. They showed up to their appointment with Bama toting a box of cookies that were shaped and decorated like the RVs, signage, and structures on the Lazydays lot. To Bama, it seemed every time they turned around or asked a question, he got caught on camera with his hand in the cookie jar or a mouth full of crumbs.



NEW SEASON

The combination of the larger-than-life sales experts, passionate customers, and amazing RVs all come together to create a fun and unique show. As much as it's about wanting to go inside some incredible RVs, it's about the stories, the personalities, and the dream. Tune into the third season premiering with back-to-back episodes Sunday, August 14th at 9pm & 9:30pm ET/PT on Travel Channel.

Lazydays RV

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