Ahh, the Airstream life: the open road, the invitation to adventure, the escape from the mundane...

You pull into a slick campground or you make your way on side roads to a solitary boondock. It’s glorious — until you have to back the thing up.

Learning how to efficiently back up a trailer, wrestling with those often-unintuitive laws of physics, can reduce the stout of heart to the knees of jelly (and the steady of voice to the shaky and profane). But technology, which has brought us such wonders as being able to watch our cats play at home while we’re trapped in a cubicle at work, has done it again: Several automobile manufacturers now include vehicle options combining software and hardware that will guide a hitched trailer into a parking slot, a tight campsite, or even your driveway.

One automaker involved in self-backing technology is Land Rover, which offers the Tow Assist package — a refinement of their Driver Assistance Features tech — for their Discovery and Sport models. Nathan Hoyt, product communications manager at Jaguar Land Rover North America, says the breakthrough solves a dicey problem.

Land Rover, Ford, and others are making a self-backing truck/trailer combination a reality. The moiré-like vinyl wrap was applied for a demonstration on this European-spec (right-hand drive) Discovery at the LA Auto Show.

Hey Trailer, I’m Busy. Mind Backing In Yourself?
“Instead of [the driver] having to know how to counter-steer, we’re able to use existing self-park technologies and the vehicle’s backup camera to simulate the trailer’s trajectory and have the car steer for you. The owner simply directs where they want the trailer to go, using a rotary controller and the vehicle’s back-up camera.”

The company demo’d the system in downtown Los Angeles in conjunction with the 2016 LA Auto Show, putting a 22-foot Bambi through its paces and neatly placing the trailer in a mocked-up campsite slot.

“The trailer worked flawlessly and our media guests loved it as something uniquely American. It was a great photo op for many of them,” says Hoyt. Customer interest in the Tow Assist-equipped Discovery has been excellent: Well over 21,000 advance orders came in on this fifth-generation model.

An array of sensors and cameras combined with computer logic makes backing a trailer easy for anyone.

“Every product in the Airstream Life Store is something I’ve personally tested in my Airstreams, and would recommend to a friend.”

Rich Luhr, Publisher & Editor Airstream Life magazine

**ESSENTIALS for AIRSTREAM TRAVELERS**

**SOLAR/ELECTRICAL**
- Portable solar
- SmartPlug, cellular antenna upgrade

**APPAREL & ACCESSORIES**
- Pendleton blankets, Airstream Life shirts, hats, wood sink covers, teak mats

**TOOLS & PARTS**
- Tire changing kit, spare keys, rivet tools, essentials

**SAFETY & SECURITY**
- TST Tire Pressure Monitors, Megahitch Lock

**OUTDOOR**
- Zip Dee chairs & fabric, electric kick scooter, EasyTurf mats, Claw tie-downs

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Owners might think they’ll need their digital native children to show them how to maneuver while staring at a screen and rotating a control dial, but don’t worry: If by accident you started to — or even if you deliberately tried to — back it into a neighboring trailer, the Tow Assist system’s alarm would tell you to back off.

Ford has put similar technology called Pro Trailer Backup Assist in its new F150. The driver steers the trailer with a control knob, while the truck steers its own wheels and limits vehicle speed. That system also utilizes advanced camera equipment, while Ford’s Super Duty trucks use even more advanced integrated cameras for their Trailer Reverse Guidance system. Audi also uses a similar rotary-control touchscreen-actuated system for their Trailer Assistant option.

Land Rover has some other promising trailer tech in development. “We’re also investigating ‘Transparent Trailer’ technologies that help to reduce blind spots,” says Hoyt. ‘Cargo Sense,’ also in development, will allow owners to use their smartphones to check on their cargo from a secure video feed within the trailer.

Any Airstream owners who get that little clench in their guts when they are checking out a tricky backup situation are going to feel the love for these towing assistants. And Land Rover showed some love back. “This demonstration was primarily designed as a way to engage with our hosted media guests, to showcase the new technology. Airstream was a natural fit that everyone can relate to,” says Hoyt.

(Apparently guests continued to relate even if half-blinded: Hoyt told us that the Bambi was so reflective they had to put a matte vinyl film on the front to reduce glare into hotel rooms near the auto show. Now that’s star power!) Airstream owners, self-backing systems might encourage you to take your trailers where they’ve never gone before. Now, after you’ve gotten the self-backing down, botching the sewer hookup might be the only real problem.