

Suspension Upgrade

By Stefanie Galeano-Zalutko

Selling and installing aftermarket products designed to work with a pickup's factory rear leaf springs can provide customers with improved ride quality while offering a nice profit center for retailers.

Late-model pickups can seemingly do it all: haul a heavy load, pull a large fifth wheel or trailer and chauffeur the entire family in comfort – all while abiding by federal fuel economy regulations. They are functional, versatile and attractive – but not above improvement.

Tow without the appropriate aftermarket suspension system, and “prepare to have the trailer drive you,” says Jack Kay, owner and president of Torklift International in Sumner, Wash.

Among other things, stopping distance is increased and there is a risk of extreme swaying, fishtailing and sagging.

Fortunately, several aftermarket suppliers – including Dynamic Suspensions, Roadmaster Active Suspension, SuperSprings and Torklift – offer tried-and-true aftermarket products

specifically designed to work in tandem with a vehicle's rear leaf springs to enhance payload and towing capacities, decrease or eliminate sway, improve ride quality, limit wear and tear on the vehicle, as well as reduce the overall cost of ownership.

What's more, representatives for those companies say offering such a solution to customers can create crossover marketing opportunities and healthy profit margins for dealers and service shops that sell and install those products.

Torklift's StableLoad

“Instead of creating an uncomfortable and even dangerous ride with a trailer, an aftermarket suspension upgrade can help or eliminate the issues associated with towing and/or hauling,”



Torklift President Jack Kay (right) explains the features and benefits of the company's StableLoad product, which is designed to enhance a pickup's factory suspension system to make ride control safer and more comfortable when carrying or towing a heavy load.

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says Kay, who grew up in the RV business working at his family's Torklift Central dealership location in Kent, Wash.

Offering a product that can make the ride safer and more comfortable when towing a heavy load was exactly what Torklift had in mind when it debuted its StableLoad product for pickups in 2011, according to Kay.

Different than any other enhanced suspension system, the American-made Torklift StableLoad is specifically designed to work collaboratively with – and subsequently enhance – the OEM leaf spring system, Kay says.

“Truck manufacturers have invested millions of dollars in their factory suspension. We wanted to engineer an aftermarket product to specifically enhance the OEM suspension – not modify or permanently change the way it works,” he says.

As a result, “StableLoad is simply the only product on the market to accomplish this collaboration by unleashing the latent stabilizing energy already present in the truck's multi-million-dollar, factory-engineered rear leaf spring suspension system,” he adds. “All other aftermarket suspension systems put an ‘add-on’ into the highly technical and finely tuned factory design, which inevitably leads to unbalanced negative side effects that often require additional suspension add-ons to counter such side effects.”

Essentially, a single application alleviates the use of multiple suspension products. Also, universal fitments can be transferred between various vehicles and the StableLoad suspension upgrade can be turned on and off in seconds, so customers can enjoy their factory suspension while using the vehicle for everyday driving.

“The simple design is meant to pre-engage the vehicle's factory leaf spring suspension system. It works on all four original points of contact for maximum stability, rather than just two. Once the vehicle is loaded down and the StableLoad is engaged, body roll, side-to-side sway and sag are dramatically reduced. Handling and stopping distance improve as well,” Kay says.

Like all Torklift products, the StableLoad line is rigorously tested with computer simulations, followed by stringent prototype stress analysis at the company's product development center and later field tested in several different scenarios because “we must be able to live up to our lifetime warranty,” says Kay, who notes that Torklift typically releases five to 10 new products annually, “all of which are patented, so that we stay ahead in innovation.”

Ultimately, Torklift believes the best way to market its products is to allow dealers, sales representatives and retail customers to try it themselves. Installation is achieved in less than an hour, with live tech support standing by if there are ever any questions.

“For the no-drill fitments of the StableLoad, you just have to bolt the product onto the leaf springs using factory holes. If



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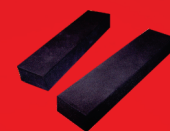
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After a lifetime working at the family dealership, Steve Plemmons is now acting as the North American sales rep for Australian firm Dynamic Suspensions. The company says its Stability Plus Stabilizer was specifically developed to help carry loads in off-road situations.

there aren't pre-drilled leaf springs on a customer's vehicle, then we have a special tool that we offer to make the drilling process that much easier. Once the holes are drilled in the leaf springs, the installation is the same as the no-drill version," Kay says.

The company is so confident about its StableLoad line, it offers a 30-day money back guarantee on top of the lifetime warranty for consumers. As for upkeep, Kay says, "The only maintenance we suggest is for customers to hose the product off if exposed to excessive road salts or salty water, just like they would the underbody of a truck and trailer. We also offer a stainless-steel version of StableLoad, which successfully combats corrosion in extreme conditions."

Dynamic Suspensions' Stability Plus Stabilizer

Australian-based supplier Dynamic Suspensions is looking to make inroads in the North American market for its Stability Plus Stabilizer.

To do that, the company has turned to industry veteran Steve Plemmons, formerly the longtime owner of the Bill Plemmons RV World in Rural Hall, N.C., a 67-year-old dealership currently in its third generation of family ownership.

Plemmons grew up in the industry, with 20-plus years as a service department technician with mechanical skills in fabrication, welding, rebuilding and wood working, as well as man-

agement training and corporate expansion.

In his relatively new role as the North American agent for Dynamic Suspensions, Plemmons is leveraging his industry experience to educate dealers, installers and consumers about the Stability Plus Stabilizer and the business behind it, whose owner has more than 60 years of suspension manufacturing experience.

Plemmons says the company's Stability Plus Stabilizer originated 10-plus years ago in the harsh Bush territory of Australia. It was invented to help carry a heavy load in more off-road situations, with many benefits to remote farmers and journeymen who are known to overload the factory leaf springs.

"The engineer said, if you control the rear end of a vehicle, you control the trailer. A truck is going to squat in the back unless the springs are stiff enough to handle it and, typically, that means the ride will be hard," Plemmons says.

Unique to the Stability Plus Stabilizer is its half-spring design, "and that's important to note," he says, "because when a spring goes all the way across and weight is applied, the front shackle



bolts can be lifted and that compromises the traction of the front tires. With our design, the front stays steady and only the rear moves up and down. This product is the first in history to actually eliminate sway altogether, thereby removing the need for those bars and sway control. It's also the world's first variable rate spring, rated from 1 to 10,000 pounds," he adds.

In addition to the half-spring construction, Plemmons credits the parabolic, variable-rate design and greaseable 10.8-grade steel bolts as features that set it apart from anything else on the market. Greaseable swing shackles allow the product to move and twist with the leaf spring, thereby reducing body roll,