

Make Your (Truck) Bed: How To Get The Most From That Open Space

(NAPSA)—Odds are, you bought a pickup truck because you thought it would be practical.

“Maybe you figured you could haul the Girl Scout troop’s cookies, help friends move, fetch home improvement and yard supplies, or carry a lot of sporting equipment in the bed,” said Sue Elliott-Sink, director of content for *enjoythedrive.com*, the consumer Web site from SEMA, the Specialty Equipment Market Association.

“But now that you’ve invested in the truck, you worry about scratching the paint, denting the bed and protecting your cargo.”

Enjoythedrive.com has some good news: You can make that truck bed a whole lot more useful if you add one or two accessories.

1. Protect the bed.

If you worry about damaging the bed when you’re loading, carrying and unloading cargo, a bedliner or rubber bed mat can provide the protection you need. Spray-on bedliners offer some cushioning for cargo, and many feature a non-skid surface to prevent stuff from sliding. Carpet bedliners also offer cushioning, are easy on the knees and are much sturdier than you might expect.

Drop-in plastic bedliners offer cargo-organizing features, such as the ability to corral cargo against the front of your bed using a 2x4. Many offer two-tier loading, so you can carry plywood or drywall, with smaller home improvement supplies stored underneath.

Most bedliners include a tailgate protector, and some are offered in “over-the-rail” designs to protect your bed rails from scratching and scuffing. If you opt for an “under the rail” design or skip the liner, you can protect the top edges of your bed and tailgate with a set of metal or plastic bed caps and a matching tailgate protector.

2. Keep cargo under control.

A variety of accessories can help keep cargo from sliding around while you drive. For instance, tie-downs and side rails allow you to secure large and awkward items to the bed rails, and a cargo web (which is like a giant, interlocking Bungee) will keep stuff from flying out onto the road.

Cargo organizers can divide your bed into smaller zones, so



Helping a friend move? Bedliners and other accessories protect your truck’s bed, and help organize and secure cargo.

you can keep plants from falling over—or grocery bags from spilling—on the way home from the store.

If you haul heavy stuff, such as bricks, mulch or gravel, a pull-out bed drawer will make loading and unloading much easier. A sturdy metal headache rack (also known as a “cab guard”) is another wise investment, since it will prevent shifting loads from breaking through your truck’s rear window.

Bed-mount bike racks will help keep expensive mountain bikes intact. And if your bed isn’t quite long enough for dirt bikes, ATVs or lumber, a bed extender can secure your load with the tailgate flat.

Should your outdoor activities require larger gear, like kayaks or windsurfers, you can secure them to a ladder rack. Some racks even adjust fore and aft to accommodate different-size cargo.

3. Lock up your stuff.

It’s hard to relax when you’re worried about thieves making off with your cargo. Fortunately, there are accessories to secure that stuff in your bed.

For instance, tool boxes come in all shapes and sizes—to lock up scuba gear, fishing equipment, guns and ammo, cameras, a gym bag, toys and all kinds of other stuff, including tools.

A tonneau cover, which fits like a lid on top of your bed, will shield cargo from prying eyes. Many hard tonneau covers also lock shut and secure your tailgate.

If you want to lock up your bed but need to haul taller items, a truck cap (or “camper shell”) provides even more secure storage space. It also offers shade and protection for dogs traveling in the bed.

4. Turn your truck bed into an actual bed.

If you love camping but hate sleeping on the ground with spiders and snakes, why not turn your pickup’s bed into a “bedroom”? A nylon tent that fits over your truck bed provides instant accommodations—or you can opt for a truck cap for a more permanent installation. Add a carpet bedliner or an inflatable air bed and you’re ready for a good night’s sleep, with no fear of mosquitoes or sudden rain showers.

For more helpful information on truck bed accessories, visit www.enjoythedrive.com. The Web site includes information on hundreds of the latest custom auto accessories, as well as links to product manufacturers’ and retailers’ Web sites. If you don’t have Internet access, write to SEMA, Truck Bed, 1575 S. Valley Vista Dr., Diamond Bar, CA 91765-3914.