

By Lt. Jason Yauman,  
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**T**he stage was set for disaster one year when my father and I remodeled the family room of our house. I'm not talking about your standard "move the furniture around and put in new carpet" remodeling.

We tore out the carpet and took down all the paneling in the rooms. We also ripped out the old wooden beams and replaced them with I-beams. Of course, we used temporary supports, which we placed at intervals based on scientific calculations. We worked much more like Tim Taylor from "Home Improvement" than Bob Vila from "This Old House."

Years before the Navy taught me operational risk management, a little voice in the back of my head would ask, "Does Dad really know what he's doing?" This happened signifi-

cantly more often than one would have imagined--at the ripe old age of 12. I already had heard this same voice many times during the current job, and I didn't know the really dangerous part of our remodeling project lay ahead.

My father, being the excellent woodworker that he is, decided we would avoid some drywall seams in the new ceiling by using 4-foot-by-14-foot sheets, instead of the standard 4-foot-by-8-foot sheets. It seemed like a great idea, except for the fact there were only two of us. We built a contraption to help us support the larger sheets while we nailed them, so I felt more comfortable.

What hadn't occurred to me was how we were going to get these drywall sheets home

# Dodging a BULLET



Photo courtesy of Steel Horse Automotive

Pickup owners often face this kind of problem.

from the hardware store. For me, the logical conclusion was to have them delivered, since we owned only a little Datsun station wagon and a VW Rabbit. Dad, however, never had discussed his plan with me.

It wasn't until I decided to go to the hardware store with him and a neighbor to pick up a few things that I learned Dad's plan. I soon figured out why we had taken the neighbor's S-10 pickup. When we approached the hardware desk and Dad said we needed to pick up six sheets of 4-foot-by-14-foot drywall, I knew we were in trouble.

Now, the jury-rigging began in earnest. We lashed together two extension ladders to support the drywall sheets and started putting them into the truck's bed. Anyone who knows what an S-10 looks like would understand the problems we had with elementary physics. The bed easily was wide enough, but the length was a real issue. With the tailgate down, we only had 6.5 feet to work with, and everyone knows the center of gravity for a 14-foot piece of drywall is 7 feet.

The problem became more pronounced as we loaded more sheets. Eventually, I had to hop in the bed of the truck to weigh down the drywall. I figured we would tie it down before leaving—wrong! At the last minute, I suggested we use some twine, but my Dad responded, “Why don't you just stay in the bed and keep the sheets from moving?”

Without a good enough argument from me, that's where I stayed during the five-mile journey home. I was scared, and a couple of times, I thought I was going to get tossed out, but we made it home without incident.

As I look back on that event, I realize why the Navy still finds that most mishaps occur off duty, not at work. If you're ever faced with the same situation, spend 20 bucks to have the materials delivered. ❏

*This story reminds me of a very similar incident a few years ago, in which the person in the truck's bed paid the ultimate price. Details are in the story that follows.—Ed.*

# A Tragedy No One Could Have Predicted

By Ken Testorff,  
Naval Safety Center

**W**ith a 40-year Navy career behind him, a highly decorated master chief was preparing, in his own words, “to fade into the civilian community.” Unfortunately, that desire would not be fulfilled.

A month after retiring, the master chief and his wife had gone to a hardware store and picked up a 4-foot-by-8-foot piece of three-quarter-inch plywood. With his wife behind the wheel, the master chief climbed into the bed of his pickup truck to sit on the wood.

He was holding on to a roll bar as the truck approached an intersection when, suddenly, a gust of wind got under the plywood, throwing it and the master chief onto the pavement. He died of massive head injuries. ❏

*According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, federal standards require that occupant compartments of vehicles be designed to protect the occupants during a crash. The beds of pickup trucks are designed to carry cargo, not people, and are not designed to provide protection in a crash. Children and pets easily can be ejected from cargo areas at relatively low speeds when the driver turns sharply*



It's never smart to ride in the bed of a pickup truck.

*to avoid an obstacle or a crash. Twenty-five states and the District of Columbia have addressed the hazard of riding in cargo areas with a variety of laws, mostly aimed at protecting children. For a list of state-by-state laws, go to the Insurance Institute's website at [www.hwysafety.org/safety\\_facts/state\\_laws/cargo\\_laws.htm](http://www.hwysafety.org/safety_facts/state_laws/cargo_laws.htm).*

*[The head of traffic safety in the Shore Safety Programs Directorate also has*

*a reminder for everyone. It's against regulations (see OpNavInst 5100.12G and MCO 5100.19E) for Sailors and Marines ever to ride in pickup beds unless the vehicle is modified to include the installation of safety belts that meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards, and state and local laws do not prohibit the practice.—Ed.]*

# Solving a Growing Problem

By Ken Testorff,  
Naval Safety Center

**A**s we learned from the previous two articles, hauling long cargo in short pickup beds, especially those with floor-mounted toolboxes, can be perplexing, as well as deadly. One solution to this problem is the Hitch Hand truck-bed extender. It's the perfect helping hand for those off-balanced loads.

The Hitch Hand is a 59.5-inch-long, curved, steel bar that fits into any two-inch box-receiver hitch. The edge of the bar rests about 39 inches behind the edge of a pickup's tailgate in the down position—just right for balancing a 12-to-14-foot load of cargo in a short-bed pickup.

Weighing only 48 pounds, the Hitch Hand has been tested and approved to support more weight than a standard half-ton pickup can hold. In other words, you will overload your vehicle—with a 750-pound cargo load—before you overload the Hitch Hand.

The bar is made from quarter-inch, solid steel. The bend in the arm acts like a huge, square spring that not only will support heavy loads but will absorb the shock from bumps and potholes. It's safe to use a Hitch Hand with your receiver hitch as long as you don't overload the rating of your hitch.

Here are some other features:

- All units have a fully adjustable height and width (up to 49.5 inches).
- In many cases, these units eliminate the need for a trailer. You don't even need a trailer to carry a kayak or a canoe.
- The units convert into table supports and sawhorses.
- The units will work with any pickup, van or SUV that has a two-inch box hitch.

One recommended caution all buyers receive from the manufacturer is to use the

Hitch Hand only in the daytime. Buyers also are urged to check local and state laws to make sure it's legal to use the product on their vehicles. The Hitch Hand isn't actually your "load;" it's a "tool" to assist in carrying your load. Anything resting on the Hitch Hand will be overhanging the edge of the tailgate, but most states have laws that permit hauling oversized items in the rear of a vehicle.

The inventor of the Hitch Hand, Brian K. Johnson, has a 20-year career in the home-improvement industry, so he knows all about trying to carry long items in the beds of pickup trucks.

The e-mail address for product information and dealer inquiries is [sales@hitchhand.com](mailto:sales@hitchhand.com). If you want to purchase a Hitch Hand (part No. 9900), call (800) 822-1478. This line will be answered "Ride America." The product is in stock at several warehouses nationwide. Cost is \$179. 

*Thanks to Steel Horse Automotive for permission to use this information and the accompanying photos.*

You can use a Hitch Hand to haul long lumber or a kayak.



Photos courtesy of Steel Horse Automotive