

# CAP-ITAL INVESTMENTS

**INCREASE IN LIGHT-TRUCK SALES LEADS TO BUMP IN TRUCK CAP SALES.**

**By Phil Sasso**

**T**ruck caps sales appear to be on an upswing.

As of this summer, light truck sales, and pickup sales specifically, are up about 10% year-to-date over 2011 according to [www.motorintelligence.com](http://www.motorintelligence.com), as reported by the Wall Street Journal. To see how that is translating to truck cap sales, we talked to several restyling shops that have a focus on truck caps.

Shops that focus on fleet sales report a strong uptick in government and commercial sales. But there also seems to be

strong growth among tradespeople and outdoors enthusiast purchases.

Many shops indicate that they tend to see a strong spring/fall seasonality in their business. Combined with strong truck sales, we are likely heading into a better fall sale season than in the past several years. If you sell truck caps this is good news. If you don't, perhaps it is time to consider growing into the truck cap market, depending on your shop's current demographics. (Go to page 50.)

Windowed truck caps, such as this one from Leer, can offer standard and optional parts, including, in this case, a tinted-glass rear door, framed side sliding windows with screens, a roof rack system and a ceiling-mounted interior gear net.





## TRUCK CAP ROUNDTABLE EXPERTS

Here are the retailers we interviewed for our roundtable:

### Dave Capelli

Dealer Accessories Services  
Feasterville-Trevoise, Pa.

### Darrin Lindsay

A&A Toppers  
Littleton, Colo.

### Russ Fletcher

Fletcher's Truck Caps  
Columbia, Mo.

### Bob Joyce

Radco Truck Accessory Products  
Brainerd, Minn., and the Upper Midwest

This aluminum-skin commercial cap from Century can be optimized with variety of toolbox, door, lock, storage and racking options. The height and shape can be specified, from traditional cab-high configuration, to "drop front" and "hi-rise" profiles that add height and interior load space.

### Fleet sales picked up this year. How has that translated to truck cap sales for your store(s)?

Fleet buyers have been forced to start replacing older vehicles. Because of that, we've seen a huge increase in commercial cap sales. In the past, that type of customer may have purchased a full- or mid-size van. But mid-size vans are gone from the market and full-size vans can't fit in most parking garages. Plus, pickup trucks with caps get better fuel mileage than vans. They're also safer because the cargo area is separate from the cab. In a crash that can mean a lot of extra protection for the driver.

— Dave Capelli, Dealer Accessories Services, Feasterville-Trevoise, Pa.

We've probably seen between a 15%-20% increase in the fleet side of our business. Much of that growth is from GSA (the federal government's General Services Administration) accounts, Colorado State University bids, as well as construction companies who have been ordering more commercial-style products.

— Darrin Lindsay, A&A Toppers, Littleton, Colo.

Most of our sales are to individuals, not fleets. We are up for the year. The year started off strong, but as the extreme heat and drought came on, truck cap sales slowed way down.

— Russ Fletcher, Fletcher's Truck Caps, Columbia, Mo.



Fleet owners may be looking for work-ready caps for fleets, such as this Swiss Caps unit with double-rear doors with radius windows and security mesh, a cab-over ladder rack, inner skin on side door, a toolbox with shelving and a drop-down tray and keyless entry.

As the Leer distributor in Minnesota and the Dakotas, we have seen strong increases in fleet business. [That may be because] Leer is known in the fleet industry as a brand that builds quality products and can respond quickly to the demands of various fleet accounts.

— Bob Joyce, Radco Truck Accessory Products, Brainerd, Minn., and the Upper Midwest

**Are single-customer commercial or enthusiast sales doing well sales-wise in your part of the country?**

Single-customer sales have been better than in the past few years, and I think that's because the market came back for us.

— Dave Capelli, Feasterville-Trevese, Pa.

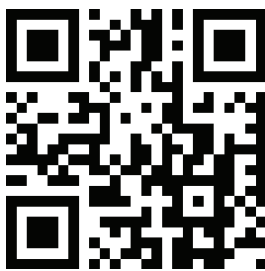
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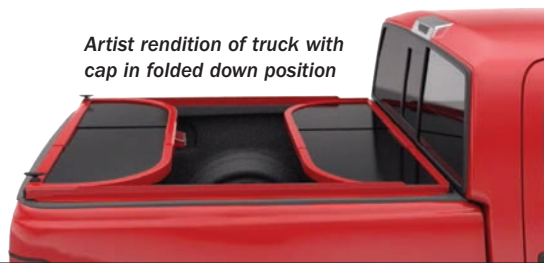


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Artist rendition of truck with cap in folded down position



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Congratulations Kevin!

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Many of today's caps come with OE painted-to-match colors, giving that original equipment look and style. This one, from Snug-Top, also has an integrated roof bar to allow for various rack attachment configurations.



Commercial racks, such as this one from Jason Industries, can offer rear-door variations, as well as tool-storage access bins.

Absolutely. We do specific marketing campaigns to our “target audiences,” trying to capture a specific trade or activity.  
 — Darrin Lindsay, Littleton, Colo.

Sales started off strong through the winter and spring. But, again, as the summer heat and drought took over, truck caps sales became very slow. We’ve received many calls from people asking for used truck caps.  
 — Russ Fletcher, Columbia, Mo.

Minnesota has a strong tradition with outdoor enthusiasts. Our sales have been strong for many years with this niche. [We’re] also starting to see a strong “come-back” from tradesmen. This is an area we expect to see steady growth over the next few years.  
 — Bob Joyce, Brainerd, Minn., & the Upper Midwest

**What are the reasons/advantages you see for customers buying truck caps, even over the lower-profile tonneau covers?**

When you consider the price of a painted tonneau cover vs. a cap you have to look at how much more benefit and function you get with a cap for not much more money. [There’s] a lot more room to put cargo; you can carry a pet with a cap; you don’t have to fold, roll or remove a cap to haul most cargo; and a lot of customers like the look of a nice cap.  
 — Dave Capelli, Feasterville-Trevose, Pa.

It seems that the Rocky Mountain region sells a few more toppers than tonneau covers. I think with our outdoor activities, we see a lot of dog owners and outdoor enthusiasts. [Our customers] like to fish, hunt and camp — and the toppers seem to fit their needs a little better. I think that the price of fiberglass tonneaus sometimes sways people to getting a topper, as the prices are too similar. We have been doing very well with TruXedo Lo Pro QT though, as some customers want to keep the “original look” of a pickup, and this fits their needs at a lower cost.

— Darrin Lindsay, Littleton, Colo.

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**Left: A new collapsible cap design provides an alternative dimension to the market. Photo from Easy Go And Stow.**

**Right: Several truck caps, like this fiberglass one from ATC, provide users with such built-in features as LED brake lights, heavy-duty rear door and oversized windows.**



Tonneau covers sales are still strong. People choose truck caps for different reasons: Some are transporting pets or hunting dogs; some like the idea of being able camp in the bed; others [want] the ability to protect and secure cargo from the elements.

— *Russ Fletcher, Columbia, Mo.*

The increases in truck cap sales we see are consistent with the growth in new-truck sales in our market. We have a strong niche of customers that prefers the additional storage options with a truck cap. The SUV-type appearance is also in high demand. [For example] the Leer 100XQ model has very unique styling and is one of our top-selling Leer models.

— *Bob Joyce, Brainerd, Minn., and the Upper Midwest*

### **What features do customers look for in a truck cap?**

Good fit and appearance so it blends into the truck and looks like it belongs. A good warranty on structure and paint so they have peace of mind. Features that make the cap more useful like sliding side windows, drop down front window, and a rack on top are all ... great benefits.

— *Dave Capelli, Feasterville-Trevoze, Pa.*

Our topper companies have done a great job in their product offerings. Side sliders for ventilation are very popular for the outdoor style customers. With pickup prices rising, we do sell the sleeker, frameless styles for the customer that wants the nicer look. Commercial cap sales, for the tradesman are up, as well. We really try to push the commercial fiberglass, as you can get the custom-painted mold of fiberglass with versatility of the side access, ladder racks and storage bins.

— *Darrin Lindsay, Littleton, Colo.*

Looks. The look is still the No. 1 thing customers consider when choosing a truck cap: "How is it going to make my truck look?" They want their truck to look a certain way. Other features that customers consider: security, weather tightness and ease of removal.

— *Russ Fletcher, Columbia, Mo.*

Side access doors or frameless side windows seem to be popular features customers are asking for. The remote lock feature offered in the Leer 100XL and 100XQ models provide customers with convenient security and are in high demand.

— *Bob Joyce, Brainerd, Minn., and the Upper Midwest*

### **What truck cap brands do you carry? Why did you choose them?**

We only sell Ranch fiberglass caps and Swiss aluminum caps. We've been [in this business] for over 30 years. We became a Ranch dealer about eight years ago and are very satisfied. We never looked back. They treat us well and if anything does come up it gets handled right away.

— *Dave Capelli, Feasterville-Trevoze, Pa.*

We offer SnugTop, Leer and Ranch to our customers. The long partnership we have had with SnugTop and Leer is very important to us. Greg Lanyon, my business partner, has had a longtime relationship with SnugTop, and I started years ago, offering only Leer. When we partnered, we pooled these two top brands, and it has been mutually beneficial. We recently took up Ranch a few years ago, and they do broaden our product offerings. With SnugTop, Leer and Ranch, we have the most complete product lines in our region, from affordable to the premier topper line. With the inventory that both the Littleton and Lakewood stores carry, these brands have helped us grow in our market.

— *Darrin Lindsay, Littleton, Colo.*

I'm looking for quality, consistency, value and timely delivery. We carry SnugTop, Century, ATC truck caps and Ranch fiberglass.

— Russ Fletcher, Columbia, Mo.

We are proud to offer both the Leer and Century brands in fiberglass truck caps. We selected them because of their industry-leading design and model offering. Radco also designs and builds our own aluminum truck caps and distributes them through our seven retail locations and a broad wholesale network.

— Bob Joyce, Brainerd, Minn., and the Upper Midwest

**Is there any certain time of the year that caps sell better than other times?**

It used to be the fall because of hunting season. But trucks are so popular we see sales all during the year, now.

— Dave Capelli, Feasterville-Trevoze, Pa.

I do think we have two "seasons" — spring and fall. We ... load a little extra inventory for the spring and fall. I think in spring, a little "cabin fever" has set in and the customers are sick of snow and ready to head out for summer. In the fall, we really want some early snow. We see a stronger fourth quarter, when we get the early snow, hopefully by Halloween. When Thanksgiving rolls around, the holidays seem to preoccupy buyers' thoughts. Our fall is also strong [because] it's when we start to see the hunting crowd.

— Darrin Lindsay, Littleton, Colo.

Fall, spring and early summer are typically the best times for truck cap sales; this is when people are preparing to travel for either vacations, or hunting or fishing trips.

— Russ Fletcher, Columbia, Mo.

Truck caps sales are real consistent for us. With the exception of January and February, we really don't see huge peaks or valleys in sales.

— Bob Joyce, Brainerd, Minn., and the Upper Midwest

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