

BIG FUN in a LITTLE RIDE

Class B rigs from Roadtrek offer ample space, ease of handling and relief at the fuel pump.



By Steve Savage

Spending more time at the pump and enjoying it less? These days it's hard not to notice the rising price of fuel, which many say contributes to the fall-off in sales of motorized RVs. There is, however, a segment of the market in which sales are on the rise—Class B motorhomes. For those new to RVing, Class Bs, also called van campers, are riding a wave of popularity. Not to be confused with conversion vans popular in the '60s and '70s, today's Class Bs are motorhomes in every sense of the word. Some of the most popular examples of this genre come from our neighbor to the north, Roadtrek Motorhomes of Ontario, Canada.

In the event you have not had the opportunity to step through the doors of current models, the first thing you will notice is, although small in size, they offer all the amenities found in their larger cousins. That means Roadtrek motorhomes not only go down the road with an agility not found in larger motorhomes, they also provide facilities for relaxing, cooking, and sleeping, as well as a surprisingly useable bathroom.

For the record, Class B motorhomes have a number of things going for them beyond fuel efficiency. Let's discuss size first. While the sheer size of class A and C motorhomes can be intimidating, driving a Roadtrek is as familiar as driving the family soccer van. Small size also can be its own reward. Like Stealth fighters, Class Bs may fly under the radar screen of many townships' parking restrictions. That means more opportunity to park near attractions and no need to tow a daily driver behind a larger motorhome. You might also be able to park your motorhome in your driveway, something that may not be possible with other types of motorhomes (check local ordinances in your area).

Roadtrek offers two choices when it comes to chassis. The GM Express van chassis is available with optional

four-wheel drive and features substantially more cab room than that found in competitor's vans, especially on the passenger side. The RS Adventurous and the Agile are built on the increasingly popular Sprinter van chassis with a Mercedes Benz engine. The nod for fuel mileage goes to models on the Sprinter chassis, given its diesel power plant.

As with all motorhome manufacturers, Roadtrek has models varying in length from their shortest 170 models, about 17 feet long, to widebody 210s, in which the standard van body has been largely removed and replaced with a sculpted fiberglass shell built on a frame extended 18 inches in the rear. The added 18 inches touches the tape measure at roughly 23 feet in overall length. The longer, wider body makes possible a completely enclosed bath and a larger bed in the rear.

Roadtrek has some tricks up its sleeve when it comes to making the most of an admittedly small footprint. The first order of business is dropping the floor in the GM Express based models. This has several advantages: first, it makes for more headroom without mandating a



higher profile. Six-footers are welcome here! Secondly, lowering the floor reduces the center of gravity, making for improved handling. Of course, the Sprinter chassis comes standard as a higher profile van, thus the standard floor is maintained in the RS Adventurous and the

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Agile. Models on either chassis retain ample aisle width to make passage easier.

Now that we have the chassis out of the way, let's talk about living well in a motorhome that has been getting "buffed" in the gym. While

strated on the Roadtrek website.

So the bath and galley share space, how about sleeping and eating? All Roadtreks feature sitting areas in the rear, which convert to double, queen or king beds depending on the model. Conversion is accomplished by rearranging cushions, all of which are made with two foam densities, a soft

is by design, making it possible to turn in for the night while a section of the coach is still available for the resident night owl. A flat screen swivels and can be viewed from the back or front of the coach.

When I say Roadtreks are fully equipped, that means there is a fridge and microwave in the galley, a small propane-fired furnace for really cold weather, and an added nicety more typically found in high-end motorhomes—a heat pump in the rear. Building the heat pump in rather than mounting it on top of the roof reduces overall height and helps maintain a van-like appearance. For those unfamiliar with heat pumps, think reversible air conditioner capable of providing either warmth or cooling. Heat pumps are usually all that is required until things are frosty, say down to about 50 degrees. Then it's time for the furnace. If the nearest electrical receptacle is miles away, switch on the generator mounted beneath the coach. If this isn't the perfect design for tailgating at the local college football game, I don't know what is.

Failing to mention the decidedly upscale interior trim would be a mistake, but exterior features certainly match the trim level found in the interior of the coach. Roadtreks are head turners with compartments, including slideout drawers in some models. Touches like macerator pumps ease the task of emptying holding tanks, and rear doors are retained on all models, opening into storage space beneath the rear seating area.

For my test drive, A & L RV Sales



some Class Bs offer a bath in name only, in Roadtreks a portion of the center aisle converts to a bath with a shower, commode and sink.

Through the ingenious use of a liner for the galley sink, personal hygiene is kept separate from cooking requirements. When the bath is not in use, the aisle reverts to passage and galley use. Converting space for varying uses is fast and easy, as ably demon-

strated on the Roadtrek website. Constructing the cushions in this manner creates a surface that is comparable to the standard box spring in your bed at home.

In some models, the forward area of the motorhome immediately behind the driver and passenger seats is the designated eating area, with seats that swivel and an expandable table. Separating the front and rear in terms of function

in Johnson City, Tennessee, allowed me the use of a Roadtrek Popular 190 mounted on a GM chassis with four-wheel drive. A & L is one of the 'Tri-Cities' largest full service dealerships, offering everything from the smallest to the largest in RVs. As I suggested earlier, driving a Roadtrek is no more difficult than driving a standard van, albeit a very attractive van.

The driver's station has all of the features found in your family car, along with the four-wheel drive selector mounted on the floor immediately to the right of the driver's seat. To keep things in perspective, even with four-wheel drive, ground clearance is not adequate for stump-jumping and extreme off-roading. In the slop of winter or the mud of spring, however, changing to four-by-four will keep you going where others can't.

One of the first things I noticed is how much quieter the Roadtrek is than a traditional van-based Class C. Given the added weight of the four-wheel drive, acceleration is somewhat slower than would be the case with standard drivetrains, but keeping up with traffic was never a problem. Just get in and go! Since my intention was to shoot some pictures to accompany this article and the day was a balmy 70 degrees, I headed to the local parks, where the dogwoods were in full bloom. Picture taking was slowed by walkers and joggers who stopped to compliment me on the appearance of "my van." Although there were positive comments aplenty about the Roadtrek's

appearance, no one seemed to realize it was an RV.

Being used to larger motor-homes, I was impressed with the nooks and crannies that collectively provided substantial added storage space. The model I was piloting had belted seating for five, including two in the cab, one behind the passenger seat and two on the electric sofa in the rear. At the push of a button and a minute or two of rearranging, the rear sofa became a king-size bed. Accessing the storage area under the rear seat was easily done through the double rear doors.

Proving there is ample headroom for a six-footer, I had no trouble moving about and found that converting the bath/galley took less than a minute. It is obvious that a great deal of thought has gone into designing components that multi-task easily.

A 30-amp shoreline, along with exterior shower, boxed awning and a macerator for dumping rounded out this user-friendly package. This is one classy ride. For further information on the entire Roadtrek line, go to www.roadtrek.com.

Steve Savage is TrailBlazer's technical editor.

