

Roadtrek 190-Popular

This Chevy Express-based motorhome van is a small package with big surprises

By Stuart Bourdon

Class B motorhomes, or to the layperson, van-conversion motorhomes, are typically sold to empty nesters. At least that's the story Class B sales statistics tell. It makes perfect sense — the van conversion is just about the right size for a couple of people who want to cruise and camp in comfort and convenience. Roadtrek is the top seller in its market category, and its 190-Popular model is a perfect example of the genre. We tested a 2002-model-year Roadtrek 190-Popular based on a Chevrolet Express 3500 extended van and found it full of pleasant surprises that couples (or small families) of all ages can enjoy.

OUTER LIMITS

One of our favorite aspects of the 190-Popular was the ease of operation. If you've ever driven a van, sport-utility vehicle (SUV) or pickup truck, you will have no trouble handling the Roadtrek. It's easy to get in and out of normal parking places, a snap to get settled into smaller remote campsites, and highway driving is a pleasure. Sumptuous seating, especially in our unit fitted with leather captain's chairs, and plenty of leg and headroom in the cab, allow for hours of stress-free driving.

While the exterior of any Class B will probably never be described as stylish, the shell of the Roadtrek 190-Popular is attractive and purposeful. The optional ground effects package on our unit provided exterior storage facilities and access through locking panels to systems such as the house battery, exterior shower and city water connection. The side windows and overhead-cab portholes are large — good for sightseeing — and like the rear windows are deeply tinted for privacy. A 40/60-split side door makes entry and exit of the coach easy, and the wide-swinging rear doors open fully to allow easy loading or egress.

INNER SPACE

Inside the coach, life can be somewhat cramped. We call it compressed. It's really a matter of learning to do the same old things with less room. Once you get the hang of it, it's really quite pleasant. The galley is diminutive, but certainly capable, and we had no problem preparing meals with the two-burner LPG cooktop and small (0.7-cubic foot) microwave oven. A small fridge sits below the stainless sink and molded-fiberglass countertop adjacent to the cooktop.

If you've already made the rear dinette into your bed for the evening, cozy dining for two can be easily created using the "third" seat positioned near the side doors, spinning the front passenger seat to face rearward, and inserting the pole and tabletop into its floor-mounted position. The bed is just large enough to fit two adults, but being tall (6 feet, 2 inches), I had to rest diagonally when stretched out flat across the padded expanse so my feet wouldn't dangle in space. That led to a question: Why three seats, when you can comfortably only sleep two? Silly us. That third seat is used in conjunction with the reclining front passenger seat (which folds flat) to form a third sleeping position. I tried to use it for a nap, however, and found it inconceivable that an adult would find a good night's sleep in such a small space.

You would be amazed how many people had to come in and see it to believe it when we answered affirmatively to their questions about whether or not the 190-Popular had a head and shower inside. The Thetford marine-style toilet is built into a tiny closet that unfolds out into the aisle to create a shower stall. A shower faucet and removable head are mounted just above the toilet,

and the floor of the coach between the head and galley is waterproof and drains through a central trough to the gray water tank. A track in the ceiling guides the shower curtain around to encircle the occupant.





QUIRKS AND PERKS

The 190-Popular is built on a 1-ton GM van chassis and powered by a 5.7L (350 ci) Vortec V-8 engine. This provides a sturdy backbone for the mini-motorhome, but the vehicle isn't lightweight and weighed in (wet) on a public scale at 8080 pounds. That included cargo for two persons, a full freshwater tank (26 gallons), LPG tank (12 gallons/52 pounds) and fuel tank (31 gallons). The Roadtrek literature cites a 6100-pound tow rating (calculated at weight of base vehicle with no options) and the rig was equipped with a Class IV receiver hitch for towing. With a GCWR of 13,500 and a wet weight of 8080 pounds, the total left over for cargo and trailering was 5420 pounds. Add the weight of passengers and a little more luggage (we travel light) and you've got even less trailering capacity. With the Popular-190 fully loaded with crew and cargo, we would recommend you maintain a 5000-



pound maximum trailering capacity. That's still plenty to haul a nice little boat along on your camping trips.

One of the more interesting pieces of standard equipment on the Roadtrek 190-Popular was the 12,000-BTU Dometic Heat Pump. Used in place of a more traditional AC unit, and integrated into the rear of the van's ceiling, the heat pump could chill the room in seconds flat. Heat pumps can also act as heaters, but for cold-weather climates they're not considered as good as old-fashioned LPG furnaces. Our unit also carried a 16,000-BTU Suburban furnace as standard.

Storage is another topic worth discussing. While there is no shortage of it — for two or three passengers — the majority of the interior storage is broken up into small cabinets, with the exception of a medium-sized

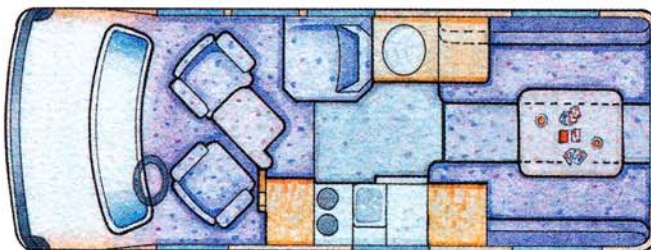


(Top) The galley is small, but well-stocked with appliances. (Left) A heat-pump, mounted above the rear dinette/bed, is used in place of a traditional AC unit. (Right) The bathroom door swings out and then unfolds to create a shower stall.

wardrobe directly behind the driver's seat and kitchen cabinet under the cooktop.

Other notables include a second freshwater tank inside the coach. Half of the black water tank lies inside the walls, as well. This makes the van suitable for all but the most extreme cold-weather camping expeditions. And according to the manufacturer, by using antifreeze in the black- and gray-water tanks, you can also use the van in moderate subfreezing temperatures.

From bumper to bumper, we found the 2002 Roadtrek 190-Popular a mini-motorhome that was full-featured and easy to live with. We can see why it would be such a big hit with empty-nester types. And while you could use the vehicle as a camper for three, there aren't belted seat positions or sleeping accommodations for more than a trio of passengers. Our most important discovery though, was that all of these comfort and convenience features would make the 190-Popular a big hit with couples of any age. ▲



2002 Roadtrek 190-Popular (Chevy Express 3500)

Base Price:	\$61,984
Price as Tested:	\$67,948
Overall Length:	19' 11"
Overall Height:	8' 4"
Overall Width (w/o mirrors):	6' 7"
Interior Height:	6' 3"
Wheelbase:	155"
Weight (wet):	8080 lbs.
Freshwater:	26 gals.
Gray Water:	24 gals.
Black Water:	13 gals.
Sleeping Capacity:	3 persons

Notable Standard Features: LPG connection at rear bumper for outside barbeque, 12,000-BTU heat pump, 45-amp converter/charger, 16,000-BTU furnace, microwave oven, two-burner cooktop, 4-cubic-foot fridge, inside and outside shower, marine-style toilet, AM/FM/CD stereo system, 52-pound LPG tank, monitor panel, roof vent with thermostatic FanTastic fan.

Notable Optional Features: awning, ground effects package with integrated storage, Onan 2.8 Kw generator, leather captain's chairs and lounge seat, screens for side and rear doors, 13-inch TV and VCP, wiring harness, aluminum wheels.

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