

The History of Home & Park

How Roadtrek became North America's best-selling camper van

HOME & PARK MOTORHOMES STARTED BUILDING CAMPER VANS AT just the right time, during the RV industry's zenith in the mid-1970s. However, you'd never know it.

As other manufacturers shook off the gas crunch of the early part of that decade and began to capitalize on the newfound appreciation for the RV lifestyle, the Kitchener, Ontario, company plodded along in rather unspectacular fashion.

Back in 1974, future Home & Park president Jac Hanemaayer had loved the idea of the class B motorhome so much that he decided to design his own, commissioning an upstart local builder, Home & Park, to construct his prototype. When he saw what they came up with, he bought the company. Hanemaayer and his three-man operation quietly produced 30 to 40 vehicles a year until he decided one day to change forever the way camper vans were built.

"His area of interest was always in design and creation," says son Jeff Hanemaayer, now chairman of his father's company. "He loved to invent stuff." And that's exactly what he did in 1980 when he revolutionized the design of class B motorhomes.

Jac never liked the conventional floor plans that everyone else produced. The pullout cab-over bed that no one but the kids really wanted to sleep on. The choice of either a convertible dinette or sofa, which always seemed too small and each morning needed to be converted back to its role as a sofa or kitchen table. Some customers had also complained that the side-facing couch made them carsick during transit, which didn't help matters. The shared rear galley and bathroom, both of which seemed too



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1978 TO 1984 TO 2002.

small, didn't do much for him either.

Jac's travels in his self-designed camper van confirmed his belief that there was a market for a small camper that people could easily drive and park but still came with all the comforts of larger motorhomes. With the debut of the Home & Park Roadtrek in 1980, Jac showed the world exactly what that recreational vehicle could be.

There were no sacred cows in the 1980 Roadtrek. Gone were the pullout bed and side-facing dinette or sofa, replaced by four forward-facing chairs that merged into two single beds come nighttime. The galley and bathroom were enlarged and moved forward to mid-vehicle, with a rear double bed now occupying the rear of the camper.

Jac lowered the flooring inside, between the frame rails and from the cab to the rear axle, allowing him to lower the raised roof, thus creating a more aerodynamic and aesthetically interesting exterior. He kept the proven Dodge chassis as Roadtrek's foundation. This groundbreaking design is



essentially the same one found today on the 190-Versatile, one of five different models the company produces.

"Mr. Hanemaayer was the innovator of the [class] B business," says Raymond Dwyer, owner of Van City RV in St. Louis, Missouri, who has carried Roadtreks since 1993. "My personal opinion is that the B business probably wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Home & Park. They did it right, and they pretty much invented the business."

In the years that followed, Home & Park evolved from a small-time outfit selling their wares to Dodge dealerships in Canada to North America's top-selling camper-van builder. By 1982, 18-year-old Jeff had assumed a loftier role with the company and had a few ideas of how to make this happen.

He knew that while Roadtrek may be a superior product, the rest of the

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world wasn't going to find out about Canada's little secret if they didn't get the word out and change the way they sell. The part-time college student pushed hard, forging relationships with the more than a hundred dealerships that now carry the Roadtrek brand, while shepherding the company from just a handful of employees to the approximately 220 folks Home & Park employs today.



**LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON: ROADTREK
ORIGINATOR AND ELDER STATESMAN
JAC HANEMAAYER WITH COMPANY
CHAIRMAN JEFF HANEMAAYER.**

"If you get in this business half-heartedly, you're not going to do very well," says Jeff, who points to the example of the rash of full-line RV manufacturers that recently bailed out of the class B marketplace. "The ones who are successful are dedicated to it. We don't try to be a full-line RV manufacturer."

According to Jeff, Home & Park is more than content with being the "big fish in the small pond," with 32 percent of the market share. Jeff believes the challenge now lies in exceeding customers' high expectations in terms of quality, something on which he believes the RV industry as a whole should focus more attention. Home & Park is the only RV manufacturer to have achieved ISO9000 accreditation, an audited measurement of quality that ultimately helped reduce warranty costs by more than 50 percent.

"From a quality standpoint, our

product was very good or excellent by RV standards—but I don't consider the RV industry a very good benchmark," says Jeff, who admits he's striving to be on par with the craftsmanship found on BMW vehicles, for example. "We're ahead of the RV pack, but that's not the pack I'm racing."

"We went on a big quality kick," says Pete Mateja, Home & Park's president and CEO. "We've been trying to drive towards automotive quality," which, according to Mateja, is a higher standard than customers are used to—and they're starting to insist upon it in their recreational vehicles.

Another recent challenge for Home & Park has been the announcement that DaimlerChrysler will no longer produce Dodge van chassis after July 2003. Home & Park currently produces five different brand models (the Roadtrek 170-Popular, the 190-Popular and 190-Versatile, and the 200-Popular and 200-Versatile) on a choice of Dodge (for the time being) or Chevrolet chassis.

All Roadtrek camper vans sleep between two and three occupants, and each is built with the same low profile and floor-plan variations that established Home & Park as a major player. Prices range from \$51,000 to \$65,000. The company plans to move completely to Chevrolet chassis within the next year, and Jeff foresees business as usual.

"It's not a secret how to be successful," Jeff says. "You offer the customer 'unrivaled product value,' a combination of design, quality, price and service. We've provided that, as far as I'm concerned, better than anyone else." ☺

Home & Park Motorhomes

Employees: 220

Hometown: Kitchener, Ontario

Population: 300,000

Products: Approximately 1,500 class B motorhomes per year

Slogan: "The Motorhome that Drives Like a Van"

Contact: 888-ROADTREK

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