

Mark Twain's Hannibal, Missouri

Official Publication Of The Family Motor Coach Association

SINGLE COPY PRICE \$3.99

FAMILY MOTOR COACHING



JUNE 2006 • VOLUME 43 • NUMBER 6

www.fmca.com

*Ramblin' In The New
Four-Wheel-Drive Roadtrek*

Motorhome
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Roadtrek Rolls Out 4x4 Model

By LAZELLE JONES

Each year Home & Park Motorhomes wages an all-out effort to garner a larger share of the market — several markets, actually. One is the leisure travel sector, which boasts many active motorhomers. Other markets include those who enjoy outdoor pursuits or “extreme” sports. Whether its occupants choose to motor through a vacation land, drop a line in a quiet lake, or rappel down the face of a cliff, a Roadtrek works. And whichever market Roadtrek owners come from, at the end of the day they all demand

the comforts and amenities of home. This coach makes an equally comfortable refuge, whether in a luxury RV resort or a primitive camp setting.

Home & Park, based in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, produces approximately 1,500 of these van-based coaches each year. The motorhomes range in length from 18 feet 9 inches to 21 feet 11 inches, and are based on either the Chevrolet Express 2500 regular van, Chevrolet Express 3500 extended van, or Dodge Sprinter 2500 van chassis. And to augment this excellent lineup, Home & Park recently introduced a Roadtrek with four-wheel drive.

This past March, I took delivery of a Roadtrek 190-Popular, the first four-wheel-drive unit to roll off the production line, and my wife and I headed straight for an adventure I’d been waiting to enjoy for some time. It involved traveling down Utah’s Burr Trail, which leads from high mountain meadows down through the lower reaches of Capitol Reef National Monument. I challenged this motorhome for its road and trail driving performance, interstate behavior, and overall livability. It passed every test with flying colors.

Home & Park begins building this motorhome by taking a Chevrolet 3500

van chassis directly off the production line and shipping it to Quigley Motor Company Inc., located in Manchester, Pennsylvania. There, the necessary components — independent front suspension with front axle disconnect (no manual hub locks), transfer case, independent differential, suspension linkage, etc. — are added to make it a four-wheel-drive vehicle. The coach has a two-wheel-drive high gear, which you can use when four-wheel-drive is not needed, as well as four-wheel-drive high-gear and four-wheel-drive low-gear capability.

Quigley's quality program makes it an approved modifier of Chevrolet chassis, and you can pull into a Chevy deal-

er anywhere in North America and get this system serviced. Quigley has a great depth of experience in providing the four-wheel-drive system; the company has been converting van chassis since 1974, and its modified units can be found in service all over the world and in some of the harshest environments, where reliability is of the utmost importance.

The shifter that is positioned adjacent to the driver's seat yet out of the way is the only clue as to what lies below the graceful and clean exterior lines of the Roadtrek 190-Popular — a transfer case that can be shifted on-the-fly from two-wheel-drive high to four-wheel-drive high and back. You don't

have to manually lock any hubs on the front wheels before shifting. You simply move the shifter aft into four-wheel-drive high or forward to return to two-wheel high. This can be done only at speeds below 60 mph, however. In addition, moving into four-wheel low from two-wheel high requires vehicle speed to be lower than 5 mph.

In the majority of cases, four-wheel-drive high gear provides the most traction you will ever need (it's all we needed). It was perfect for the icy, snowy, wet roads we found in early March in the mountains of Utah. It does affect fuel economy a little when the unit is in four-wheel high, but that's a small price to pay when traction at all four wheels is necessary.

We calculated the fuel economy on two occasions. The first time, it came in at 13.6 miles per gallon; the second, 13.9 mpg. The first calculation involved a mix of mountain and canyon trail driving and highway motoring. The second calculation was strictly high-speed interstate driving. But keep in mind that we started out with fresh water filled to capacity (31 gallons) and a full fuel tank (35 gallons). We also were carrying all the gear and stores necessary to live on the road for a week, plus the weight of two adults. My guess is that if we had maintained a steady 55 mph on the highway, the fuel economy of the 4x4 190-Popular would have been between 15 and 16 mpg.

During each leg of our 1,700-plus-mile adventure, the Roadtrek was put through changing performance requirements. It handled everything with strength and stability.

The power of the 6.0-liter Vortec fuel-injected engine and the four-speed automatic transmission (with a tow/haul mode) was more than sufficient. We cruised all day at 75 mph, and at times we had to accelerate to get around slower-moving vehicles. The power response was instant.

When weighed fully loaded with water, fuel, gear, and one adult passenger, the front axle came to 4,100

continued

The Roadtrek 190-Popular type B from Home & Park Motorhomes built with the four-wheel-drive option enables drivers to take on the backcountry with all the comforts of home.





pounds; the rear axle, 4,860 pounds, and the total, 9,000 pounds (gross). The coach's gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) is 9,600 pounds — meaning that, even fully loaded, the coach still had unused cargo capacity.

We didn't tow anything during our excursion, but the 190-Popular with the four-wheel-drive option is rated to tow another 7,500 pounds. So, your Roadtrek can haul a utility trailer with ATVs, motorcycles, a boat, or other toys. Home & Park officials did point out that if you launch a boat with this unit, you must keep the generator in mind. The gen set is located in a rear compartment that hangs down below the coach floor, and you must be sure

not to submerge it when backing down a ramp into the water.

Solo female travelers — a major segment of the Roadtrek market — are comfortable with the coach, for its size is not threatening, and the cockpit has a familiar automotive look. I felt comfortable navigating through any kind of traffic or road condition. We took the motorhome successfully to several different fast-food restaurant drive-throughs (make sure there are no clearance issues if you try this), and when we got to the 1.3-mile tunnel in Zion National Park, we proceeded just like any passenger car. Most other RVs (motorized and towables) are required to pay an additional \$15 and be escort-

ed through the tunnel because of clearance issues. Because of the Roadtrek's size, we could use any RV campsite that was available, and didn't need a pull-through site.

In addition to the two cockpit doors, the 190-Popular has a double door on the curb side. It latches in the center and is hinged on either side. The rear double doors also open wide, providing access to a large storage area below the bench seat of the rear dinette. Running boards at each of the front cockpit doors and at the side entry make it easy to step into and out of the coach.

I noted two aspects about our test coach that I would change. One is that if you are 6 feet 2 inches tall (or more), you can't quite stand straight up inside without pushing against the ceiling with your head. The coach's interior height is officially 6 feet 1 inch. However, the majority of people are not so tall, so this will not pose a problem for most travelers.

The second item to note is that the control switch for the 750-watt inverter, which is under the street-side rear dinette bench, cannot be reached when the bench is converted to a bed. A Roadtrek representative did tell me that a remote-control panel will be added to future units and is available from the inverter manufacturer for units already built.

Onboard utilities in the 190-Popular include battery-powered (DC) interior lighting. The 750-watt inverter draws its power from the house battery also. The inverter is used to power the 17-inch flat-screen television/DVD player and one of the three 110-volt AC receptacles.

The 16,000-Btu forced-air propane furnace (the propane tank has a 45-pound capacity) also gets its DC power from the house battery. This coach has an extra exterior compartment where a second house battery can be added. I do recommend that buyers acquire the second battery simply for the added reserve.

The 2.8-kilowatt generator and the 30-amp shore power line provide 110-

volt-AC power for the microwave oven, the three-way refrigerator-freezer, and the 12,000-Btu roof air conditioner with heat pump.

The coach comes with a propane-fired water heater and dual fresh water tanks (with dual fills) totaling 31 gallons, a 23-gallon gray water tank, and a 10-gallon black water tank. The dual fresh water tanks allow use of the fresh water system in sub-freezing temperatures (down to 10 degrees Fahrenheit) by utilizing the interior tank only (leaving the exterior tank empty). Roadtrek employs a waste drain pump called a macerator that requires only a small-diameter dump hose, because it chops up solids and tissues as it ejects the black waste water.

And at the end of the day, this motorhome yields mega amounts of livability. My wife and I had all of the comforts of home immediately at our disposal. We made up the king-size rear bed — which occupies the same space as the rear dinette — and just left it that way throughout our trip. That's because we had ample room in the salon-galley area. There, you can comfortably prepare food, watch television, and dine at the fold-up stowaway table.

The flat-screen television is mounted on the wall near the rear dinette/bed area, but it's on a pivoting arm, so you can swing it out and watch it from the front living/galley area if you wish.

The coach has a marine-style toilet that can be temporarily sequestered from the rest of the area with bifold doors. For shower and wash-up facilities, the Roadtrek includes a full stand-up shower that can be easily put into service. To use the shower, first remove a panel from the center-aisle fiberglass lowered floor, and you find a trough with a drain. (Until this floor panel is removed, it is not apparent that a shower is even available.) Open a floor-to-ceiling door opposite the galley to reveal a track-mounted shower curtain that pulls around to enclose the area. The shower head can be attached to the wall or be hand-held. Shut the privacy door in the center aisle, and the entire area

becomes your shower space. For a lavatory, you can use the hygienic sink liner that is stowed below the galley counter. Place it in the galley sink, and you have a spot for shaving, brushing teeth, and so on while keeping the galley sink clean for food preparation.

Privacy curtains can be drawn around the front of the cockpit, and they function well. It's a good manual system. All of the window coverings, including the windshield privacy drapes, are made of a thick fabric that does an exceptional job of insulating against heat transfer. We camped one night in the snow at Bryce Canyon and stayed snug.

Galley appliances include a microwave oven, a 3-cubic-foot Dometic refrigerator, and a two-burner propane cooktop. Home & Park designers have made good use of all the nooks and crannies inside, converting them into storage cabinets. Anyplace where storage can be captured, it has been. Some cabinets are small, while a long galley-length cabinet is located above and across the galley countertop. Below the galley counter is a large cabinet that features one midline shelf and a pull-out drawer. Deep overhead storage cabinets surround and match the configuration of the U-shaped lounge/dinette in the rear.

Beneath the Roadtrek's graceful exterior lines and smart interior décor lies quality construction. Upon receiving the 3500 extended van, Home & Park employees take the following steps. First, the van body is prepared by removing numerous items, including the fuel tank, which permits the floor to be lowered. This yields a lower-profile roof and shorter overall height.

Openings are cut on both sides for



the windows, and the van roof is removed. Openings are also cut for the storage area in the running boards, the refrigerator vents, the water heater, and battery access. Underside tank supports and structural reinforcements are welded in place, as are steel cross members to support the lowered floor. The fiberglass floor is then installed and the original fuel tank is reinstalled, along with the propane tank, the generator, and the holding tanks.

The Roadtrek's fiberglass roof includes ½-inch rigid insulation, with structural wood placed where items are secured to the ceiling. One-inch fiberglass insulation is installed, and a vinyl ceiling liner is added. The interior wall panels feature fabric that is laminated to fiberglass, metal, and wood substrates. The interior walls are insulated with 1-inch fiberglass sheeting. Finally, the cabinetry and other woodwork interior appointments, which are preassembled in the company's wood shop, are installed using screws and adhesives.

continued



Sleeping floor plan (above)
Living floor plan (left)

Manufacturer . . . Home & Park Motorhomes, 100 Shirley Ave., Kitchener, ON, Canada N2B 2E1; (888) ROADTREK (762-3873), (519) 745-1169; www.roadtrek.com/FMC

Model tested . . . 4x4 Roadtrek 190-Popular

Floor plan . . . Popular

Chassis . . . Chevrolet Express 3500 extended van

Engine . . . 6.0-liter SFI V-8

Transmission . . . GM Hydromatic four-speed, electronic-controlled automatic with overdrive

Axle ratio . . . 4:10:1

Tires . . . LT 245/75R 16E

Wheelbase . . . 155 inches

Brakes . . . four-wheel disc with ABS

Suspension . . . independent front suspension

Alternator . . . 145 amps

Batteries . . . chassis — (1) 600-amp; coach — (1) 12-volt deep-cycle, 95 amp-hours

Steering . . . power with tilt

Electrical service . . . 30-amp

Auxiliary generator . . . 2.8-kilowatt Onan MicroLite gasoline with remote start (optional)

Inverter . . . 750-watt with three-step

45-amp charger

Exterior width . . . 79 inches

Exterior height . . . 8 feet 6 inches

Interior height . . . 6 feet 1 inch

Exterior length . . . 21 feet 3 inches

(with optional Continental spare tire kit)

Gross combination weight rating (GCWR) . . . 16,000 pounds

Gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) . . . 9,600 pounds

Gross axle weight rating (GAWR) . . . front — 4,300 pounds; rear — 6,084 pounds

Wet weight as tested . . . front — 4,100 pounds; rear — 4,860 pounds; total — 9,000 pounds

Payload as tested . . . 600 pounds

Frame construction . . . body on frame

Insulation . . . 1-inch fiberglass on exterior walls

Fresh water capacity . . . 31 gallons including 6-gallon water heater

Holding tank capacities . . . black water, 10 gallons; gray water, 23 gallons

Fuel capacity . . . 31 gallons

Fuel requirements . . . gasoline

Propane capacity . . . 45 pounds

Water heater . . . 6-gallon

Suburban, propane-powered with bypass, 12,000-Btu

Water delivery system . . . demand, 12-volt with Shurflo water pump

Furnace . . . 16,000-Btu Suburban, propane automatic

Air-conditioning . . . (1) 12,000-Btu Dometic recessed unit with heat pump

Refrigerator . . . 3-cubic-foot Dometic three-way (12-volt, 110-volt, propane) with automatic source selection

Toilet . . . Thetford with foot pedal flush

Warranty . . . chassis — 36-month/36,000-mile limited “bumper to bumper” with factory warranty retained on all unaltered portions provided by GM; coach — 48-month/48,000-mile limited warranty provided by Home & Park; four-wheel-drive conversion — 36-month/36,000-mile limited warranty provided by Quigley Motor Company

Base suggested retail price . . . \$65,624 (without four-wheel-drive system)

Price as tested . . . \$84,611

The manufacturer's base suggested retail price of the regular two-wheel-drive Roadtrek 190-Popular is \$65,624. With the following options, its as-tested price came to \$84,611: alloy wheels; Fiamma box awning; Continental spare tire kit; flat screen TV/DVD player; four-wheel-drive with independent front suspension; 2.8-kilowatt Onan Microlite gasoline generator with

remote start; locking differential and external transmission cooler; LX package — sand-colored paint with charcoal lower body, minimalist striping, and maple dash trim; leather captains' seats and lounge seats; seat belts in rear; Winegard crank-up TV antenna.

Home & Park employees do a masterful job at designing and building the Roadtrek, and with the new four-

wheel-drive option, the number of places you can drive this fully self-contained, stand-alone motorhome appear to be endless.

We enjoyed our adventure and would suggest that anyone who tries this coach will enjoy theirs as well. If a downsized motorhome is in your future, you need to investigate the Roadtrek for yourself. 🚐