

RV *gazette*



ENERGY SAVERS



- **A Bright Solution-Solar Power**
- **2009 Roadtrek RS-Adventurous**
- **2010 Dodge Ram Heavy Duty**

\$4.75



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2009

By Howard J. Elmer

Roadtrek RS-Adventurous

It's a new generation of road warrior.

Less than perfect weather is a vacation reality; same as it is when I do road tests. Sometimes I change dates by days or even weeks to avoid rotten weather, but when I get just one day to test an RV, I have no choice but to take what I get weather-wise. This was what happened for the test of the Roadtrek Class B motorhome when I travelled to Kitchener, Ontario.

At the factory, a light snow fell and -10°C temperatures were not bad. Instead, it was the gusting winds — up to 60 km/h — that really overshadowed the whole test, creating snowdrifts, whiteouts and evil crosswinds. Not fun. But, as the day wore on, it occurred to me this poor-weather drive frankly offered the best test conditions I could have hoped for. In perfect weather, every vehicle seems to drive well, so keep this weather picture in mind as I describe my test of the 2009 Roadtrek RS-Adventurous.

This is the largest Class B Roadtrek builds and it's based on the Dodge Sprinter 2500. While this is the

second generation to be sold in North America, it's important to remember this van is the staple of the European parcel and vocational market, and has been for at least the past 20 years. In fact, the Sprinter is the top-selling cargo and passenger van built as a Mercedes-Benz in Europe.

This is a three-quarter-ton platform powered by a Mercedes-Benz 3L diesel engine pushing power to the rear wheels through a five-speed automatic transmission. This diesel makes 154 horsepower and has a torque rating of up to 280 pound-feet. This newest engine comes with a new aluminium crankcase, a balancer shaft and two overhead camshafts per cylinder bank. Dodge says this smoothes out vibration and I'd agree with them. Also part of this new diesel powertrain is a diesel particulate filter that makes it compliant with new Canadian environmental regulations. Fuel economy is said to easily top 20 miles to the U.S. gallon.

One of the best things about using the Sprinter as a base for this construction is that with its mega-roof



"I enjoyed my time in the Roadtrek, despite the weather."

option and large doors, meant to accept full pallets, Roadtrek can concentrate on the interior décor and systems as there is no need to raise the roof or lower the floor. What this means from an engineering standpoint is all the chassis components, suspension parts, running gear and powertrain were designed and tested to work best within the shell that the builder designed. No body changes means this best-handling package remains in force. And this point is the one I want to stress as the RV's handling during that winter storm was well demonstrated.

The Sprinter is a tall vehicle, but with a low centre of gravity and a long wheelbase, it held to its own lane despite the buffeting of these 60 km/h crosswinds. This feeling of solid control was enhanced by a new standard rack-and-pinion power steering that is also height and tilt-adjustable. In addition to the steering being power assisted, it's also speed-sensitive and applies a variable-ratio response to steering input; the key benefit here comes during parking and tight manoeuvring.

But on the highway, I could just hold the wheel and even though the unit rocked hard with the force of the wind, it never wandered.

The layout of the cockpit is similar to any pickup truck with the added benefits of a very large windshield, a blunt nose that drops out of sight, excellent heated mirrors and a short shift lever that is mounted almost at the driver's right knee. It slides in and out of gear seamlessly and can be shifted manually by the driver with a flick of the lever. Working with the engine braking, this feature is particularly handy on long downhill grades holding a steady speed and saving the brakes, which are discs all around.

Much of the impressions I picked up while driving the RS-Adventurous were processed with the idea that RVers who would be interested in a unit such as this, will do a lot of driving. Frankly, that is what this unit is best for, as opposed to spending weeks at a time parked. I found that along with its easy road manners, I loved the Sprinter for its easily negotiated square

body. I'd take this unit down through Manhattan or up through old Montreal without a second thought. I felt completely comfortable behind the wheel. In fact, many people drawn to a vehicle such as this have professions and hobbies that require towing a trailer. For them, the Sprinter will also tow up to 5,000 lbs. and can be ordered with the hitch and electrical couplings right from the factory.

Just behind the cockpit are two other adjustable, swivelling high-backed seats equipped with seat belts. And while it's usually a couple who travel in a unit such as this, if there are back seat passengers, they are by no means treated as an afterthought. The seating is comfortable and the full glass sides of this RV afford an excellent view, no matter where the passenger sits. These positions even have their own window openings. They also have their own door. On the passenger side is the large sliding door that has a handy powered step that extends and retracts automatically when the door is opened or closed.

There is also plenty of room to stretch out and a post-hole in the centre of this space will support the tabletop stored beside the left hand seat. This table will also fit another post-hole just in front of the powered fold-down couch in the rear of the unit, but the benefit of having it set up forward is that the beds don't have to be unmade to accommodate it.

The galley and bathroom are opposite each other in the centre of the van and each is surprisingly large. The granite kitchen counter has prep space as well as the sink cover and cook top embedded in the stone. Above are cupboards and fine touches such as a built-in spice rack. The wood is all cherry and most of it is solid. Hardware on the cupboards supports the doors, holding them open at any angle, but they also have push-button latches. Even while driving in the windstorm, I noticed that nothing rattled. Below the counter are the 3.8-cubic-foot Dometic 3-way refrigerator and the convection/microwave oven (I'm told you can bake a cake in it, but I'll have to take their word for that). While standing at the sink, I noticed that though I'm six-feet tall, I had at least another three inches of headroom. I even fit under the A/C unit vent in the rear. The only exception to this height is up front, so when walking into the cockpit, remember to duck. I didn't, ouch!

This space is enhanced by all the glass that simply makes the unit feel larger than it is. On that note, two other things come to mind:

- while driving, I actually used the rear view mir-

ror and was able to easily do shoulder checks while changing lanes – there is that much glass; and

- each window has either a day/night pull-down shade, or curtain so, at night, full privacy can be had. Note, though, the blinds over the cook top are metal – splash resistant and easier to clean.

Across the aisle (which is 28 inches wide) is the wet bath, nicely set in a decent space with two doors that open like wings. Again these are beautifully done in solid hardwood. These are easily latched when not in use, but when using the toilet, can be locked into a second expanded position that just simply makes taking care of business that much easier. I noted (and suggested to the manufacturer) that when the doors are fully open, they should latch in that position. This came up because I was on a slight hill when I was working with them and, of course, one side wouldn't stay open. When using the shower, a plastic curtain that follows a slight outward curve keeps everything dry.

Storage in a Class B is always an issue and I wouldn't suggest there is more storage than the footprint of the van will allow. Instead, I will say I saw every usable square inch used economically and the rest devoted to storage of every shape and size. Much like designing a yacht, where space is also at a premium, this Roadtrek follows the same principles right down to cut-outs in the inner van wall that access space between the support studs.

In my test unit, the rear of the van held the power fold-down couch that would easily seat three and becomes the head of the king-size bed or the top of a pair of singles. It's wholly up to you how you'd like the sleeping arrangements made up. Also back there is the entertainment centre consisting of a DVD player, a flat screen TV that can be easily positioned, and a surround sound system with ceiling mounted speakers that will channel the radio/TV or both.

A feature that I didn't have, but which will soon be installed in these units, is a backup camera that will project onto the touch screen included with a new radio/GPS/Bluetooth system.

Certainly another advantage to an RV of this size is its ability to go just about anywhere. Of course, you need services when you get there, right? Well, with an Onan MicroLite propane generator (2.5KW), power inverter with charger, 16,000 BTU furnace, heated fresh and waste water tanks and A/C, boondocking will not be much of a challenge.

I enjoyed my time in the Roadtrek, despite the weather.

SPECIFICATIONS

2009 Roadtrek RS-Adventurous:

Captain's and lounge seats, cloverleaf table, expanded galley, permanent bathroom with sink, dinette and night table for twin or king-size bed.

Standard Features:

11,000 BTU roof-mount A/C
13-foot, 2-inch Fiamma awning
Propane BBQ quick disconnect
Granite countertop
16,000-BTU furnace
Home theatre system with surround sound
Convection/microwave oven
Power inverter with charger
Macerator sewage pump
Stainless steel sink
Two-burner stove top with glass cover
Winegard TV antenna
Suburban water heater
Frameless awning type windows
Wiring harness for towing
MSRP

\$104,125



OPTIONS

Armoire with adjustable shelves	\$425
110V coffee maker	\$125
Backup camera	\$250
Second row captains row	\$863
Onan generator	\$3,500
Optimal leather seat upgrade	\$1,150
Desert metallic exterior paint	\$3,750
Emblem package	\$275
Hanging pantry	\$300
Radio/GPS/Bluetooth	\$1,450
Rear door screens	\$425
Power rear sofa	\$825
19-inch flat screen TV	\$950
Aluminum wheels	\$1,475
Removable wardrobe	\$525

Price as tested: \$120,413

CHASSIS SPECIFICATIONS

Chassis: Dodge
Engine: 3L Mercedes-Benz diesel
Power: 154 hp and 280 lb-ft of torque

Wheelbase: 170 inches
Length: 22 feet, 9 inches
Height: 9 feet, 7 inches
Width: 6 feet, 8 inches
GVWR: 8550 pounds
Curb Weight: 7550 pounds
Fresh Water: 30 U.S. gallons
Grey Water: 20 U.S. gallons
Black Water: 10 U.S. gallons
Propane: 50 pounds

Unit provided by Roadtrek, Kitchener, Ontario.
See ad on page 13. 

Howard J. Elmer of PowerSports Media Services is a Canadian automotive journalist, truck writer and RVing specialist.

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RV and other vehicles, you will achieve
better performance and fuel efficiency.**