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Roadtrek a Canadian success story

Ontario company is North America's No.1 seller of Class B motorhomes

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Roadtrek Class B motorhomes are a Canadian success story, built in the face of strong competition in this country and the United States. Since 1990, Roadtrek, built by Home & Park Motorhomes, has been the No. 1 selling Class B motorhome in North America. Roadtrek chairman Jeff Hanemaayer said the company will sell more than 1,400 motorhomes this year.



Steve Soares guides a fibreglass roof into position on a Roadtrek Class B motorhome built on the chassis of a Chevrolet van.

"To maintain our No. 1 position, we need to offer the best combination of design, quality, price and service," Hanemaayer said. "That's also how we achieved strong export sales." In addition, "being Canadian helps as well in the eyes of the U.S. consumer from a perception of better quality." Most Roadtrek motorhomes -85 per cent -are sold outside Canada, the bulk of those vehicles going to the United States. A small percentage is shipped to Japan. The remaining 15 per cent are sold in Canada.

"The size of the vehicle is part of the appeal in Japan," Hanemaayer said, since roads and streets there are narrow. Roadtrek's Class B motorhomes are built on the chassis of Chevrolet and Dodge Sprinter vans, which results in a vehicle considerably smaller than a Class A or Class C motorhome.

"We are on course for record unit sales this year and definitely record dollar sales on the strength of the U.S. market." Despite competition from a variety of U.S. firms and several in Canada, Roadtrek moved to the top of the Class B motorhome sales charts. Canadian competitors include Pleasureway in Saskatoon and two Manitoba firms Great West Van and Leisure Travel Vans.

"Our strongest competition currently comes from other Canadian manufacturers," Hanemaayer said.

So far, more than 90 per cent of buyers are over 50 years of age, Hanemaayer said, but "we are seeing more families with two children" buying Roadtrek motorhomes. About 60 per cent of motorhomes sold are built on the Chevrolet chassis, with the remainder using the Dodge Sprinter chassis.

Roadtrek orders cargo vans from General Motors and DaimlerChrysler. When the vehicles are to be converted into a motorhome, they're taken into the factory to begin the process.

The Chevrolet Express vans receive the most modification, with the roof, part of the floor and portions of the lower body being cut away on the 170 and 190 models, and almost all of the rear section of the body -except for the side door and rear door and frame -removed on the 210 models. A raised roof is installed on the 170 and 190, and a fibreglass rear body added to the 210 after the frame is extended.

While most of the body modifications are handled in the Roadtrek plant, outside suppliers build some components such as the raised fibreglass roofs.

In contrast, the Sprinter -a Mercedes van that is sold under the Freightliner and Dodge brands in the United States -requires little modification to the body except for cutting windows in the side of the van.

Hanemaayer said Roadtrek did not offer motorhomes from the Sprinter when it first became available in 2004. Instead, the company waited until 2005 when the supply of Sprinters had improved.

"When they first came out, there were a lot of challenges getting supply."

Supply of the diesel-powered van has improved, but Hanemaayer said: "We didn't get all we wanted for 2006."

The five-cylinder diesel engine provides good fuel economy. Power is adequate for most circumstances, but can't match the output of the V8 engines in the Chevrolet vans.

An updated version of the Sprinter will become available in 2007, but Hanemaayer doesn't expect the changes to greatly alter the motorhome portion of the vehicle.

Squeezing all the features of a motorhome into a cargo van requires careful design and planning. For example, to take advantage of the space, water tanks have to be built in odd shapes.

The price of Class B motorhomes can be similar to or even exceed the cost of a Class C or a lower-end Class A.

"What you're paying for (in a Class B) is getting all those features in a van," said Hanemaayer. "It's more expensive to build watches than clocks."

The Class B motorhomes the company builds are the result of one man's determination to get exactly what he wanted in an RV.

In 1974, Jac Hanemaayer -Jeff's father -became interested in an RV for personal use. While he liked the room and comfort offered by Class A and C motorhomes, he didn't want to become a "weekend bus driver."

To enjoy the convenience and mobility of a small vehicle, he checked out the Class B motorhome market. Being unable to find all the comforts of a larger motorhome within the convenient and efficient size of a van, he designed one for himself and had it built by fledgling Home & Park Vehicles. When it was finished, he liked it so much, he bought the company.

What They Cost These are the base prices for the Class B motorhomes in the Roadtrek lineup:

- 170 Popular: \$75,225
- 190 Popular: \$78,225
- 190 Versatile: \$78,600
- 210 Popular: \$90,975
- 210 Versatile: \$91,475
- RS Adventurous: \$94,625

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