



A publication dedicated to the preservation of a classic and timeless vehicle

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THE CLASSIC

by Bill Estes

The motorhome has a sleek aerodynamic exterior shape that is accentuated by an exceptionally large rounded windshield, pronounced body curvature and large side windows — the image of a modern, sophisticated design that deviates sharply from the more usual boxy motorhome shape.

Driving the coach is much like being behind the wheel of a large luxury car. Very little road vibration is felt. Steering response is very positive, and the big gasoline engine runs quietly at cruising speeds. The coach will take mountain roads at brisk speeds like an overgrown sports car.

If this sounds like the motorhome of the future, guess again. The coach that I have been describing is the one you're intimately familiar with — the GMC Motorhome. Production began in the 1973 model year, and the last unit came off the assembly line in Pontiac, Michigan in 1978.

It appears to me that the sleek exterior shape, the relative quietness (for a front-engine design), and the sophisticated ride and handling qualities of the GMC Motorhome surpass a substantial number of late-model coaches. And I've seen a lot of motorhomes, having been a staff member of *MotorHome* magazine since the early 1970s, and having road-tested a new Eleganza II for the September 1975 issue of the magazine.

Style and aerodynamics are often trade-offs, and GMC Motorhome owners know all about trade-offs. A curved body is not as good for livability as one with square corners, but there is no comparison in a cross wind. The *MotorHome* test story emphasized the style of the motorhome, its excellent road manners, the low noise level in its cockpit, excellent visibility (and the corresponding high levels of heat transfer).

Criticisms were primarily focused on its limited self-containment, poor traction on slippery surfaces, and small storage capacity. The front-wheel drivetrain, its adjustable, air-suspended, tandem rear axles, and the stylish body were — and still are — the distinguishing traits. The story con-

cluded, "...It's one of the most sophisticated and pleasurable ways to get around this country on six wheels." And that is still true today.

The exterior design has withstood the test of time to qualify as a true classic. Beyond that, few classics can masquerade as high-level contemporary design, but a GMC Motorhome in top cosmetic condition can do that quite well. It's amazing that the GMC design, which began to take shape about 1970, could remain so viable today. About 13,000 GMC Motorhomes and Transmodes were built between 1973 and 1978, and it's estimated that 8000 to 9000 of them are still on the road.

As with all new automotive designs, there have been some problems that have surfaced with the passage of time. But Cinnabar Engineering has come to the rescue with corrective equipment and/or procedures, and the company has put the brakes on the rapidly shrinking supply of parts by obtaining a broad license from General Motors to preserve tooling and maintain parts availability.

Many GMCers are serious long-distance travelers who do not limit their excursions to the short drives that are typical of people who own classic vehicles, so parts availability is an important aspect in the survival of this classic motorhome as a viable long-distance travel vehicle. A GMC owner told me recently, "If my motorhome was totaled in a crash, I'd buy another one. Nothing is as good on the road."

The GMC Motorhome is unique, and it's a pleasure to see one on the highway — particularly one that has been lovingly cared for. I'm grateful to all those dedicated owners who spend many hours and many dollars keeping their GMC Motorhomes traveling America's highways, because the GMC adds a definite touch of class to this pastime of ours.

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