



December 1994
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TESTING THE 1975 ELEGANZA II

by Bill Estes



Editor's Note: Bill Estes wrote this article for the September 1975 issue of *Motorhome Life & Camper Coachman*. The test is one of the best independent evaluations of the GMC Motorhome, and it should be of interest to prospective GMC Motorhome buyers as well as existing owners.

It must be a good feeling to design a product so well that your competitors are among your customers. That's the position in which GMC finds itself with the GMC Motorhome, in its third year of production.

Eight RV manufacturers currently are building interiors in the GMC Motorhome shell, in addition to producing their coach-on-chassis units. The custom interiors, combined with GMC's own offerings, provide a tremendous variety of living accommodations in this tandem-rear-wheel motorhome.

The custom interiors also seem to indicate that GMC could have done a better job early in the game with items such as livability, quality of materials and workmanship — not on the chassis or body, but on the interior structures which were subcontracted in 1973 and 1974. Either that, or it says there's always room for new approaches, which is what Americans are famous for. The automotive specialty equipment market proves that whatever anyone builds, somebody will find a way to customize or personalize it. Or both.

Major changes have occurred at GMC since initial production, significant of which is that GMC now assembles the whole thing, with materials and workmanship quality which we classify as good to excellent almost anywhere you look, and super in one area: drawers. While many motorhome manufacturers are trending more to flimsy plastic drawers, the GMC Eleganza II which we tested actually had hand-sanded wood drawers with dove-tailed construction. Best drawers we have seen anywhere, and you can tell the quality with your eyes shut by the way they open and close.

But that's getting a bit too far ahead. The concept first — GMC's idea of how the motorhomer should be able to travel.

Obviously, he should travel in style. He should be able to: see where he's going and what's around him without tunnel vision; feel road shock as little as possible while still keeping that important feel for the road; have handling that makes a sharp swerve at 60 mph to avoid an obstruction a reasonable comfortable maneuver rather than a teeth-clencher; be quiet enough to permit a conversation without shouting; and be comfortable enough while in camp so that "camping" isn't a struggle...among other things. Every motorhomer has his own list like this. And it might include a few items which the GMC expressly doesn't do. Like travel slippery surfaces. It's almost helpless. Tracking, yes. Traction, no. Or, travel back roads well, without hanging up.

But this probably is by design rather than by accident. GMC apparently evaluated the motorhome market and adopted the premise that they would try to do their best job for a specific segment of the market and leave the rest alone. The "rest" includes any buyer who prefers to drive back-road areas and to park where there are no hookups. The GMC primarily is a pavement vehicle and it prefers to have a sewer hookup since the holding tank is smaller than the water tank.

To achieve comfortable and fairly economical cruising, GMC chose the front-wheel-drive trans/axle setup which Oldsmobile pioneered with the Toronado, with some notable changes. Long torsion bars form the suspension in front. They're steel bars which twist longitudinally to permit suspension movement. The front suspension has a lot of capability for "travel" (vertical movement) and in that respect the GMC ride is a little like that in the front seat of a cross-country bus. But it's not at all ponderous. Tandem rear wheels are air-suspended. The result is excellent

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