



GO WEST, YOUNG VAN

Editor's Note: When Car Biz decided to look at the state of the recreational vehicle, we realized the point of RVs is travel, and driving a desk around Detroit was not the way to get the lowdown. We sent Technical Editor and intrepid traveler Howard Kenig on the road to see what's going on ('... and don't come back without a story'). He was gone nearly a month, so this better be good.

Howard Kenig

Trans Van was my first choice. It had everything I'd need, sleeping space, kitchen, dining area, storage, and last, but not least, reasonable fuel economy. Champion's P.R. Director Gerry Kennedy came through in fine form, with a brand new 17 foot, 1979 model; I picked it up, loaded up, and was on my way.

Cruising west, across Michigan, I began to notice something. Perhaps my attention was focused because I was driving one, but RVs are all over

the place—all types, shapes and sizes—a lot of them.

The History

Though it may seem as if they've always been here (like Xerox machines and digital watches), the recreational vehicle and its industry haven't been around all that long. Popping up just in time for the prosperous '60s—the child of a marriage between the mobile home and auto industries—they've grown immensely in just a few years.

It all started in the '50s, when mobile homes began to grow from 'trailers' toward their more houselike dimensions. From a desire for more portability came the first true RVs, vehicles dedicated to recreational purposes. The travel trailer gave Americans a taste of a new lifestyle; in no time we were hooked.

Four states, a bunch of hours, and several hundred miles later I was beat, exhausted. Geez, used to be I could drive on and on, almost endlessly; must be age—or sanity—

creeping up on me. So, I slipped into a rest area, swung around and opened the sofa-bed, pulled the shades and was out before the four speaker stereo had a chance to fill the room. Not bad, I was beginning to get the RV idea.

I was jarred awake by the feeling that my boat was about to capsize. After a moment to gather thoughts, I realized I was rocking; the Trans Van being blown around in an Iowa windstorm so powerful I expected Dorothy and Toto sail by.

Getting on the road didn't help. Even the Trans Van's carefully designed aerodynamics couldn't overcome its long, tall sides, and a big gust could move me over a full lane (the optional front air dam would have helped, and improve fuel economy in the bargain). Driving anything larger, or with a trailer, would have been almost impossible. Don't tell me the Midwest is boring.

Though warm weather states like California and Florida are traditionally considered home of the recreational vehicle (ranking 1 and 2 in RV registrations), Michigan (a surprising 3rd) was there at the very beginning. It's hard to believe Ray Frank had any idea what he was starting that day in Brown City, when he decided to cut out the middleman (tow vehicle) and bolted the body of a travel trailer onto

