



A low and sleek "sportscoach" that stunned the US RV industry when it launched in late 1972. 30 years after production stopped, the GMC Motorhome is becoming a cult icon.

The GMC is the American muscle car of the RV world. It holds the [land speed record for motorhomes](#), clocking 106mph at Bonneville. It has also been immortalised several times as a [Hot Wheels toy](#), and has starred in a number of movies.

That's pretty remarkable for an RV that only had a six-year production run. But there are many remarkable things about the GMC. For starters, it was the first US RV created and built by a car manufacturer and, to this day, no other US car manufacturer has taken that risk.

GM called the project TVS-4 ('Travel Vehicle Streamlined, model 4'). For maximum grunt, it dropped in a mighty V8 — the same engine which also powered the 1968 Toronado. A claimed

260bhp were fed through a three-speed gearbox to the front wheels; with no driveshaft running to the back axle, this gave the living area an extra-low floor and lots of headroom.

The GMC looked sharp from the start, sitting low on its haunches. But the front wheel drive gave traction problems on uphill grades, especially in heavy rain or snow. Handling was otherwise decent, helped by a low center of gravity and an air spring setup for the four wheels at the back.



There was a choice of a six-berth 26-foot or a (pretty rare) four-berth 23-foot. The sleek styling gave an amazingly low drag coefficient of 0.31, which at the time was lower than the Corvette! The interior was funky even by 70s standards, designed with the help of House and Garden magazine. The wraparound glass looked cool, but in hot weather the large windows put a huge strain on the roof-mounted air conditioner.

At launch, the recommended prices started at \$14,569 for the 26-foot and \$13,569 for the 23-foot. And what a launch it was: the stock prices of all the other major US RV manufacturers fell the very next day. Their vehicles suddenly looked very old. As the GMC sales brochure said, you could now buy a “motorhome that doesn’t look like a box or ride like a truck.”

GM originally envisioned its project as a ‘multi-purpose vehicle’ for extended living. This notion was dropped once the Motorhome was launched, but in 1975 GM did launch an unfurnished Transmode model. Soon, GMCs were being turned into everything from mobile recording studios to laboratories. The Transmode shells were farmed to conventional coachbuilders such as Coachmen.

Towards the end of the production run, limited editions proliferated. Rather strangely, two ‘Coca-Cola’ models also appeared: a standard model in Cameo White with a red horizontal stripe, and a specc’d-up version called the GadAbout.

And then, suddenly, the wheels came off the bus. The fuel crisis may have played a part, but the GMC’s 8 to 10 mpg thirst was actually pretty good for a Class A with a big V8. The bigger problems were rising production costs and the impending demise of the Toronado drivetrain. Major surgery would be required to install a replacement, and GM didn’t have the stomach for it.

In 1977 GM shrank the engine, but the price by then had soared to \$38,000. There was no place for the world's coolest RV any more: in 1978, the production line in Pontiac, Michigan was shut down.

Some 13,000 GMCs were made in all, and many are still on the road today. Winnebago released a thinly-veiled copy in the late 80s called the Spectrum 2000, and GMC body parts were combined with Revcon mechanicals to create a strange hybrid replica produced by Silver Motor Coach.

Today, thirty years on, the originals are relatively easy to keep on the road. Rebuilt engines are available for around \$6,000, and the bodies are made from long-lasting aluminum and fiberglass.



Some owners restore their GMCs to showroom condition, while others update the interiors in superyacht or Airstream CCD style. The only real bugbear is the underlying frame—which could cost up to \$10,000 to fix if decayed. But a thriving restoration industry makes it easy to keep the mechanicals in good running order, led by specialists such as Cooperative Motor Works.

GM itself briefly raised hopes for a Mk II Motorhome with the award-winning GMC Pad design concept in 2005, but nothing more has been heard of this. The future of modern RV design probably lies more in the direction of VW's acclaimed 2001 Microbus Concept.

Do you own a GMC or have you previously had one? If you have why not share your pictures or experiences with us.



