

WHALES ON WHEELS

Volume XIII **ULTRA VANS** Number IV

GWFBT&SM, Best Ever

by **W. Christy Barden**

This year the Great Western Fan Belt Toss & Swap Meet in Palm Springs was an exceptional meet. It was the best swap meet I had ever seen. More NOS parts came out of the closet. I saw NOS sheet metal for the engine, cylinder head air deflectors, brand new 140 heads and a host of other NOS parts. I bought a new NOS 95 cam for my next Ultra Van engine. There were many new reproduced parts, clean used parts and of course the usual array of used body and engine parts. It was so exciting being at the biggest and best Corvair swap meet in the world. This is a low profile kind of get together. The car show was great! There were about 35 cars and forward controls entered. No judging by judges, only the people. So all those that attended voted for their favorite car or truck. There was a shortie 1963 pickup truck with a flashy yellow paint job, a 1964 all original Monze coupe with 25,000 original miles shown by the original owner, and old favorites like Herb Berkman. He is still showing his famous 1965 "CORSA X" in



Ultra Vans lined up at Angles Field in Palm Springs

beautifully condition after owning and showing it for over 22 years. Every swap meet space was sold, every RV spot was taken and they were on the edge of running out of room. CORSA WEST may need a bit more room for next years event.

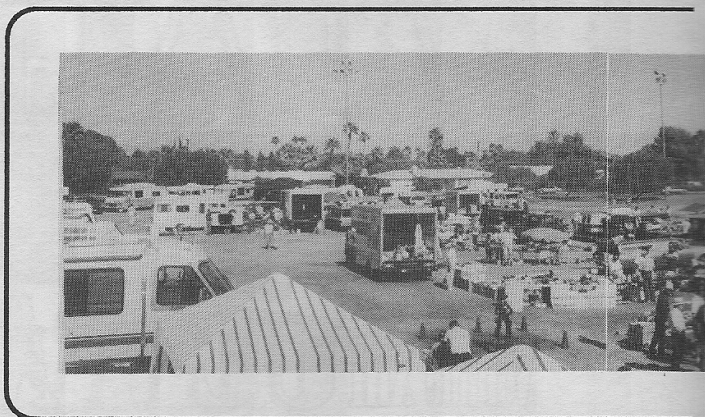
From The Editor

The GWFBT&SM (Great Western Fan Belt Toss & Swap Meet) in Palm Springs was great. I had a chance to see members **Ed & Pat Donahue** who live in Desert Hot Springs. Poor Ed had gone into the hospital to have an aneurysm removed from his intestine and they didn't sew it all up. It leaked into his body cavity and did some real damage. We almost lost him. He's recuperating now and when he gets better will go in for a final operation. Good luck Ed!

Also I was able to spend time with **Dick and Leon Campbell** (my adopted parents) at their place in Van Nuys and drove down to Palm Springs with them. Leona and I also did some dancing at the swap meet. Dick bought a few parts. The GWFBT&SM was the best it's ever been, next year CORSA WEST will be hosting the get together. We had quite a few Ultra on the field for the week-end.

I had a chance to drive **Bill Binney's #295** from Palm Springs to Morango Valley. Quite an experience going up hill at 60 MPH in an Ultra Van. More on that in our next issue. In Yucca Valley I had a nice visit with my mom and the family. Then over to Joshua Tree for **Jim and Marlene Craigs** rally. What fun that was. They really know what hospitality is! There was some paint striping on the original Ultra Van #101, eating, games and some real laid back fun. Even **Walt Davison** raised \$39.00 for the Ultra #101 Restoration Fund by cooking and selling breakfast omelets for attendees. Speaking of the fund, you can send donations to **Jim Craig**. I'm starting it out with \$100.00, would anyone like to match that! Make checks out to "Ultra #101 Restoration Fund". Jim says that when #101 is sold, any profits, after expenses will be divided between, CORSA, UVMMC, and Group Ultra Van.

The up coming Restoration Rally May 6 - 20, 1995 should be a great one if this was any indication. I can understand why the Craigs will be charging a nominal fee for the use of



all of their facilities, more water, electricity, trash, phone, etc. I'm sure everyone will understand. And speaking of the Restoration Rally, I just got off the phone with **David Peterson** and he has committed to attend the rally and help work on old #101. He will be visiting his daughter in North Hollywood, I'm going to fly into Burbank airport and he will pick me up and we'll both come up together. I'm really looking forward to that! I've included some photos on page 8 & 9 of #101 taken in 1961 by Mr. Peterson. These are available in color from **Jim Criag**, see the classified section.

I hitched a ride back to Van Nuys with **Edy Ryerson** and **Evelyn Sheperd**. We had a nice visit along the way, stopping in Victorville for lunch at the place that **Len** and **Edy** always stopped. The waitress remembered **Edy** and was sad to learn about **Len**. As you see, I had a great time and plan to do more of it in May. Join me!

A big Congratulations are in order for **Norm Helmkey** for being the recipient of the **Ernest Newhouse Award**. He has done so much for the group, technical editor, historian, writer and general all around hustler. If you want something done, ask **Norm** to do it. I heartily endorse every one's choice, its mine also. Speaking of **Norm**, he also put out an archive report stating a total of 373 Ultra Vans were produced. I had figured a total of 360 Ultra Vans produced. This did not include the 600 series, the Tiara assigned serial numbers, or experimental units. So using **Norm's** figures I would guess that 365 "round rear" shaped Ultras Vans were built. I'll use this in all figure in all future articles. Thank-you **Norm**.

As you see by your enclosed dues renewal slip the price has gone up. I couldn't help it, postal



At left shows the lay out of Angels field at the Palm Springs complex in California. Ultra Vans had their own private parking area at the right. All the other motor homes parked on the left side of the field. All the area inbetween was taken up by swap meet vendors.

rates are going up next year, and printing cost also have risen. So I hope you don't mind and it doesn't drive to many of you away. **HAPPY HOLIDAYS!**

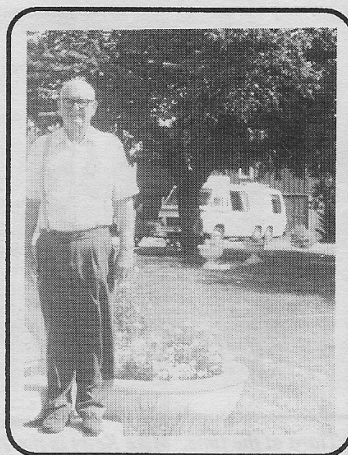
ribs, then skinning it with a new plastic material. The material was heated and molded to fit the contour of the ribs. The material had a good memory, when placed in the hot sun the material tried to straighten out again. Mike said it was quite a sight to see the panels pop out.

Tiara, The Forgotten Child

by W. Christy Barden

This is part two of an interview with Mile Kelly, an Ultra Van employee, part one appeared in the last issue of Whales on Wheels.

Before the Tiara there were some other attempts in engineering a new unit. An Oldsmobile Toronado was put in the front of an Ultra Van. It was too heavy a unit in front, and the Ultra Van was too low of a profile to have the engine up front and have the room to put driving chairs in as well. Using all that up front driving and dining area for an engine defeated the Ultra Van concept. Next they tried to fit a Dodge truck chassis with a body. Using aluminum stringers and



Mike Kelly with his GMC motorhome in the background

Mike related that toward the end young Mr. Tillotson brought in a friend from Kansas City to run the operation in Hutchison. His name was Mr. Burgess and was the president of Luscomb Aircraft Company. From what Mike said this new plant superintendent bought with him much of the equipment from the Luscomb plant. He didn't know what kind of a deal was made, but intimated that Mr. Burgess made quite a bit of money selling this equipment to Ultra Van. Mr. Burgess offered Mike the plant managers job, but he turned it down. He didn't want to have to fix the previous guys poor job. So he worked on Tiara number 1, 2, and 3 and then was let go. Mike worked there for one year and three months to shut down. It was the end of Ultra Van. Old man Tillotson had set a limit of three million dollars, and they went whizzing right past it and he shut the operation down. Mike felt that purchasing inefficiencies didn't help. Wrong parts were ordered and not returned, there was no control. The managers reorganized and started a company called BELCO which finished the production of the Tiara in the same plant at the Hutchison airfield. Mike related that they kept all the chiefs (who he felt contributed the Ultra Van's demise) and fired all the Indians. BECLO became Collings Industries and went on to the manufacture ambulances. Mr. Lewis Ediger President of Ultra

Van became VP. of Collins.

Originally young Mr. Tillotson encouraged his father to pursue the Ultra Van project to ease him out of the publishing business. They ran Modern Handicraft Publications, which put out "Work Basket" and "Work Bench." Mike said they grossed one million a month with this business, but the expense of the Ultra Van operation was too much of an offset to their profits. The operation had passed the three million mark set by old man Tillotson and he shut it down.

Mike drove a 1967 Mustang back and forth to work from Wichita and his son Robert remembers him coming and going. During that time there were about 100 people working at Ultra Van. Mike talked about the gymnasium floor and how easy it was on the feet and legs. You could work for hours on a good wood floor, as compared to a concrete floor that would get the legs hurting in a few hours. He really liked that. When the Air Base was built there were many Omish people that were displaced from the land. Some of them worked at Ultra Van. He describes them as "work horses" as they did good work.

Mike said this was one of the best work experiences he had. He was involved in engineering, sales, production, etc. He remembered going to the RV show in Louisville with Jim Howser, he owned Motor Coach Co. a motor home dealer in Charlotte North Carolina who sold over 40 Ultra Vans. It was Mr. Tillotson policy that everyone from executives

to line employees should go out in a motor home and find out first hand what its like. This was easy to Mike for he had always had an interest in motor homes. He currently owns GMC Birchaven 23 foot motor home. It shows a June 28, 1978 manufacture date by Coachman Inc. GMC stopped building these unites in 1976. I ask how could this be? He related a bank VP ordered it in 1978 along with two others. He has what he thinks might be the last GMC motor home built with serial number 1288-172852 (RVIA S/N 2443056) He is also involved in building a "roomy" motor home on his Ford one ton chassis. After Ultra Van Mike worked at Beach Aircraft in Wichita for ten years as a tool design draftsman, and then retired.

Mr. Kelly offered the following list of personnel who worked at Ultra, Inc. during this time:

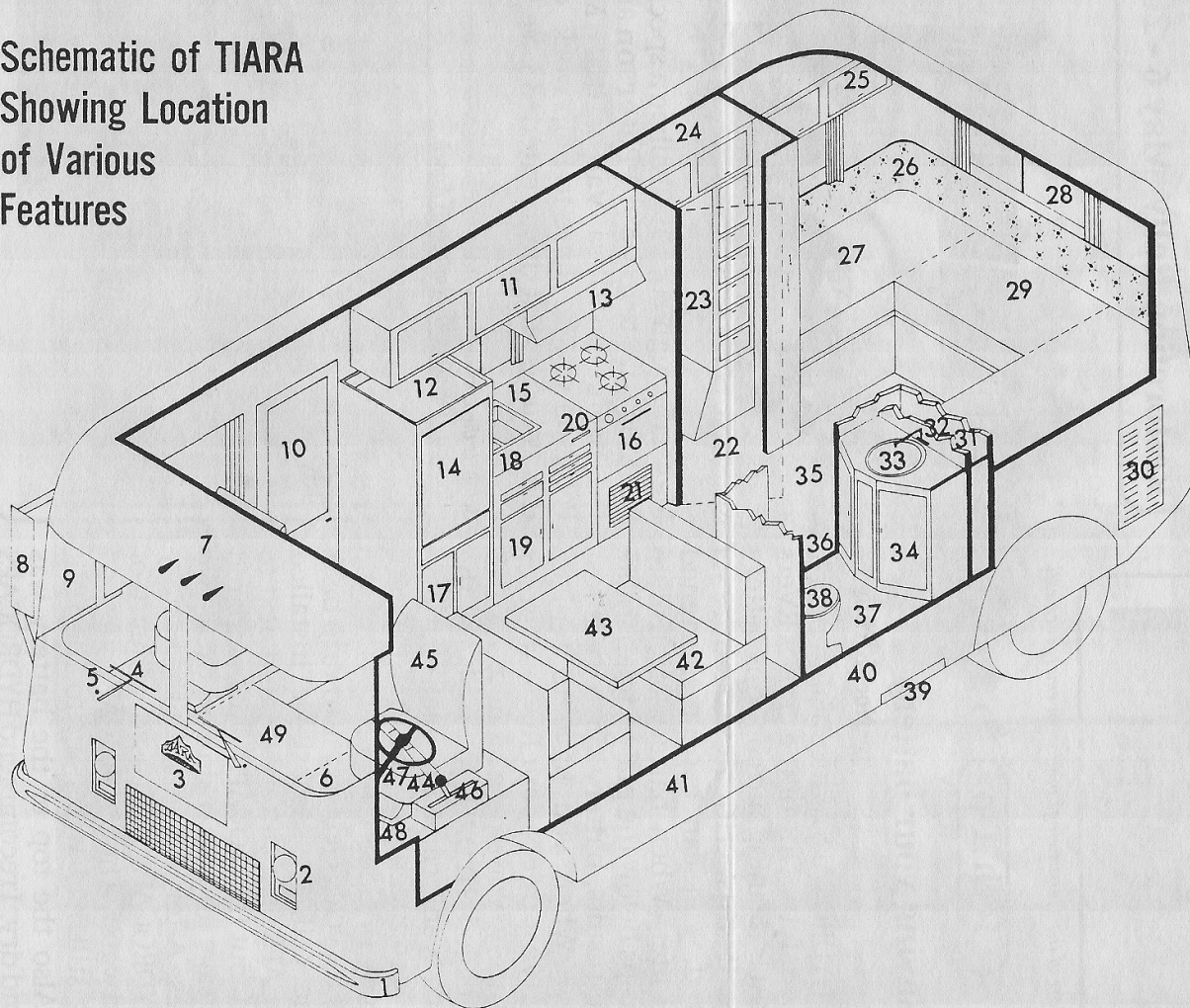
Jack Tillotson, Publisher of Work Basket & Work Bench; Lewis Ediger, President of Ultra Van V.P. of Collins Industries; Robert Lind, Purchasing Mgr. Ultra Van, Retired V.P. Belco; Mr. Borgess Superintendent Ultra Van, President Luscomb Aircraft. Currently lives in Grain City, MO; Larry Knite, Sales Mgr. Downtown Hutchinson, KS; Wayne Nobbs, Engineer Ultra Van, Chance Manufacturing (currently), 3115 Farmington Rd., Hutchinson, KS 67502. (316) 662-0863; Don Peters, Shop foreman Ultra Van, Director Collins Industries; Jim Howser, Motor Coach Co., 210 Providence Rd., Charlotte, NC 28207. (704) 375-5631. Ultra dealer that sold 40 some Ultra Vans; Mike Kelly, 11002 W. 21st., Wichita, KS 67205.



This is a 1970 Photo of the crew that was working on the Tiara at the time. Mike Kelly is the 9th from the left.

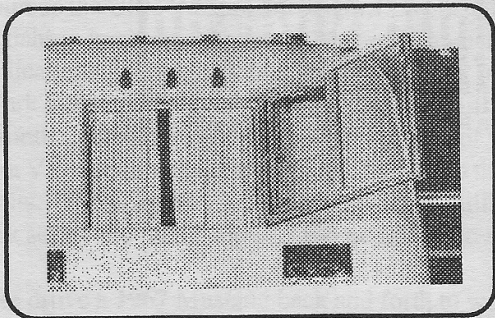
Schematic of TIARA Showing Location of Various Features

5



1. Shock absorbent bumper
2. Headlights and park lights
3. Access door
4. Windshield wiper - 2 speed
5. Windshield washer
6. Padded dash
7. Clearance lights
8. Rear view mirror
9. Wrap around tinted windshield
10. Entrance door with window
11. Galley overhead storage
12. Storage shelf, with lip
13. Hooded vent with light and fan
14. Eye-level gas-electric refrigerator
15. Stainless steel double sink
16. Range with oven and broiler
17. Storage
18. Drawers
19. Hot water heater and pump
20. Breadboard
21. 23,000 BTU forced air furnace
22. Closet 26" x 38" with door that closes across aisle making separate compartments
23. Closet drawers - 5 each
24. Closet storage cabinets - 3 each
25. Overhead storage in bedroom - 7 cabinets
26. Vinyl padding
27. Basketball player size bed - 54" x 87"
28. Window that opens like a door
29. Storage
30. Twin LP tanks - 20 lbs. each
31. Storage and knick-knack shelves
32. Mixing faucet
33. Stainless steel lavatory
34. Linen and toilet paper storage
35. Wall to wall carpet
36. Sliding bathroom door
37. Bathroom - 28" x 48" with telephone shower, medicine cabinet, shower curtain
38. Automatic marine stool
39. Dual emptying system access door
40. 50 gallon holding tank
41. 50 gallon fresh water tank
42. Divan - bed combination
43. Dining table - removable
44. Seat belts
45. Quilted vinyl bucket seats
46. Turbo Hydra - Motor shift console
47. Power steering
48. Power brakes - front wheel disc
49. Olds Toronado 375 HP V-8 engine

(316) 722-3528; Robert Kelly (Mile's son), 11080 W. 21st., Whichita, KS 62205. (316) 721-0955



Rear window of the Tiara swings out for an emergency exit.

Tech Tip

Saving your battery

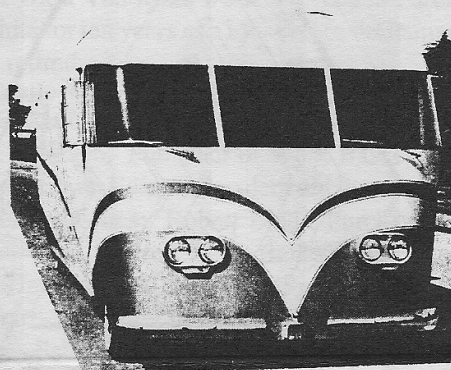
by Noel Kirkby

Battery HYDROCAPS reduce maintenance, increase safety. One of the chores RVers hate most is cleaning and checking battery water. If this critical procedure is neglected, you can expect shortened battery life. When battery electrolyte level drops below the plates, irreparable damage results, battery capacity is lost forever. When you have to replace expensive deep cycle batteries prematurely, you waste money. A small device called HYDROCAP replaces the standard vent caps on each battery. Gasses produced by the battery are recombined inside HYDROCAP. A catalytic process recycles electrolyte to drip back into the cell. As a test we installed HYDROCAPS on a battery located next to one with out HYDROCAPS. We compared water usage and corrosion on these two batteries. After four months the battery with HYDROCAPS had used a quart of distilled water. The HYDROCAP equipped battery still had water up to the split ring. Also the top of the battery was clean and dry. I recommend HYDROCAPS for batteries located inside your Ultra, or

for RV's in storage for long periods and where you can not service the battery regularly. For information contact George Perone, HYDROCAP, 975 NW 95th Street, Miami, FL. 33150 (305) 6962504.

Noel is the owner of RV Solar Electrics in Scottsdale, Arizona and is a member of Group Ultra Van. (602) 443-8520

Restoration Rally May 6 - 20



May 6 through 20, 1995 will be a special working tribute to David Peterson and the prototype Ultra Van #101. Mr. Peterson will be there to help work on the vehicle that he created 33 years

Below is the cooking crew from the November restoration rally held at the Desert Rendezvous Ranch.



At right on page 7 is all the fun had at the November restoration rally held at the Desert Rendezvous Ranch.



Photo below is Mr Peterson behind the wheel of Ultra #101 shortly after it was found in 1991.



earlier in that small garage in Oakland California. This will be a very special event, coming full circle with Mr. Peterson bucking rivet and giving orders just like in the old days when he was building Ultra Vans in Oakland California. To be part of this all you have to do is show up with some work gloves and clothes. Bring the family for there will be plenty of other activities as well. Jim & Marline Craig will be hosting what is becoming

David Peterson will return to help restore Ultra Van #101 that he created over 33 years ago.

“The Rendezvous” place for Ultra Vans. The goal is to have #101 painted, and on the road so it can be driven to the 1996 Ultra National Week in Hutchinson, Kansas, the Manufacturing place of the Ultra Van. There will be striping more of the old paint, some body work, painting, electrical, brakes and bearings, plumbing, replace the floor, and if time permits, interior work. If you can't come and help then send a donation to help in the expenses. Make your checks payable to UTLRA #101 Restoration Fund and send it to Jim Craig. So by all working together it is possible to attain this goal. The rally will also include the usual bar-b-que, potluck, games and technical and

craft sessions by Bob & Grace Ballew. There will also be a visit to the local restored train depot. There will be a rally fee of \$5.00, this includes a dash plaque denoting “I helped to restore the original Ultra Van #101. “ Also a charge of \$1.00 per day per person will be charged to help offset the additional expenses incurred with so many people at “The Rendezvous”. Contact the Craigs at 7011 Sunny Vista Rd, Joshua Tree, California. (619) 366-9104. It might be nice if you let them know you are coming, and let them know your area of expertise, paint, electrical, paint, etc.

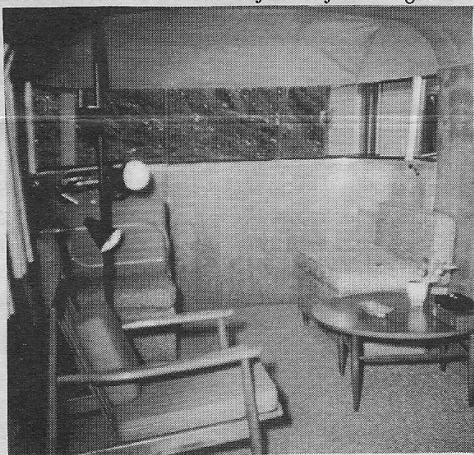


This is part of the restoration crew from the November rally. They are standing in front of Ultra Van #101. That's Sandy in the front center.





These photos of Ultra Van #101 were taken by David Peterson in 1961 after he finished construction. Note the plain interior and the front trailer hitch to lower his boat into the water. These color photos can be obtained for your collection along with someothers. See bottom of Classified at right.



Classified

1968 Ultra Van #380, 110 H.P. Corvair, powerglide. New exterior paint, curtains, carpet and upholstery. Ken Woiak, 4551 W. Abbott Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53220. (414) 421-3972. \$7,000/offer.

1969 Ultra Van #473, 110 H.P. Corvair, powerglide. Complete restoration. New suspension, rebuilt engine, transmission, differential. New carpet and upholstery. New paint and tires. Jean McMasters, 916 Lighthouse Drive, North Palm Beach, FL 33408. (407) 626-0388. \$12,500.

1969 Ultra Van #492, 110 H.P. Corvair, powerglide.

Lots of extras, exceptionally clean inside and out. Hal Horner, 11126 Hollywood Ave., Youngtown, AZ. 85363. (602) 977-1815. or 8347 Zinnia Ct., Arvada, CO 80005. (303) 422-4367 (located at Christy Bardens in Boulder CO) \$8,975.

1969 Ultra Van #497. 140 HP Corvair, Powerglide recent rebuilt. New windshield. Needs body work on left side and rear. Donald T. Elliott, 32 Weiss Hill Road, Oroville, CA, 95966. No phone. \$4,900.

1970 Ultra Van # 549. Cheve 307 V-8. 157,000 miles. Roof Air, small body damage, new paint. Jack E. Davis, 100 No. Cheyenne St., Silver City NM 88061. (505) 536-5955. \$5,700.

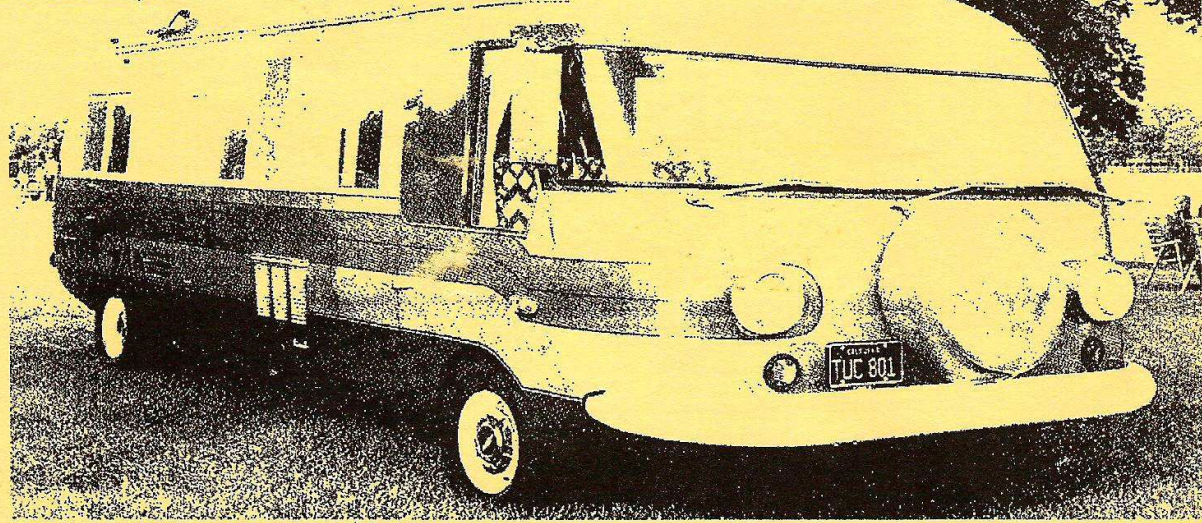
The Ryerson Ultra Manual A real necessity for Ultra Owners. \$70.00 includes UPS delivery in USA. Edy Ryerson, 18618 Rayen Street, Northridge, CA 91324. (818) 349-5058.

Parts for Sale. The following from Jim Craig #163, 7011 Sunny Vista Rd, Joshua Tree, CA 92252 (619) 366-9104.

Orig. Hdlite Chr. Bezels, Eye Brow type, \$75 pr. + \$25 refundable core charg., Spec. Rub trim for bezels \$8/pr., Alum. Tanks: 30 gal (gas or water), \$275, 50 gal. water or holding, \$350., Alum vinly coated ceiling panels 4X8, \$64., Walnut coated 4X8, \$56., Danish coated, \$56., White plastic triangle cor. sinks, \$18., Finally! Clear Backup lens, \$3., rubber light assys. w/clear or yellow lense, \$12., Emerg. brake cables, (state lenth) 144", 163" or 197": \$25 ea., Speedo cable housing, 80", \$15., Finally also!, Ultra Van/ Hutchinson name plates, \$15. ea, Main Dr & rear hatch latch/lock assy. w/two keys, \$35., foam bumpers, \$40 ea., bumper vinyl covers, \$12 ea. Shipping extra. NOS orig turn signal assy. w/emerg, flasher & wiring harness. Do-Ray Lamb Co. Flash-all #999, \$25. Decal sht. 9"X12" w/over 70ea different named decals, such as "Fresh water pump", "lights", "Wipers, "ingition" Etc. Black w/chrome background \$8 ea. real quality. Auto trans Pan bolt reinforcement place kit \$6 set. Main Dr. latch handle replacement return springs. \$4 pr, Call or write for list of over 350 other Ultra Van Parts. Also 4"x4 1/2" new color 1960 photos of the Original Ultra Van #101, 3 ea. show the interior views and 3 ea. of the interior. Reprinted from Stereo slides, taken by David Peterson in 1961, selling at my cost of printing, incl. postage, \$9.50.

GROUP ULTRA VAN

5537 PIONEER ROAD
BOULDER, COLORADO 80301-3048



FIRST CLASS MAIL

Rallies

January 18 - 22, 1995. Black Canyon City, Arizona. Filthy Five Community park, (Yavapai County Park System.) Emergency Number (602) 374-5262. Hosts: Dan & Betty Reinhardt (602) 846-6929; Warren & Nobia Suckow (602) 841-0911; Threasa Vandersteeg (602) 977-4358

March 22 - 28, 1995. Sebastian, Florida. Sebastian Church of Christ on Main Street. Hosts: Jean and Bette McMasters, 916 Lighthouse Dr., North Palm Beach, FL 33408. (407) 626-0388,

January 28 - April 1, 1995. Florida Spring Round-Up, Orange Lake, Florida. Celebrity Resorts, 4555 W. Hwy. 319 Orange Lake, FL. (North of Ocala) 1 (800) 542-5560. Hosts: Morris & Tennie Randle (813) 642-6610; Pat & Marge Fitzgerald (813) 474-6468.

April 19 - 23, 1995. Anticoh, California. Brandon State Park. Hosts: Robert and Roberta Franz, 220 W. Fourth Street, Antioch, CA 34509. (415) 757-3557. Mory and Esther Snyder, 100 W. Fifth Street, Anticoh, CA 94509. (415) 757-3092.

May 6 - 20, 1995. Ultra Van #101 Restoration Rally. Desert Rendezvous Ranch, Joshua Tree California. Hosts: Jim & Marlene Craig, 7011 Sunny Vista Road, Joshua Tree, CA 92252. (619) 366-9102

June 5 - 8, 1995. Jackson, Ohio. Hosts, Paul & Charlotte Rowland, 291 Orange St., Jackson, OH 45640. (614) 286-2266.

July 25 - 30, 1995, CORSA International Convention, Dallas, Texas.

September 19 - 24, 1995. UVMCC National Rally. KOA Campground, Silver City, New Mexico.

June 19 - 22, 1996, CORSA, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

WHALES ON WHEELS IS A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF GROUP ULTRA VAN, A CORSA CHAPTER. IT IS DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION AND USE OF THE **ULTRA VANS**. This 22 foot unique motor home was designed by David Peterson and built in Kansas until 1970. About 365 units were built in all. Dues are \$6.00 annually, please remit to the Secretary-Treasurer. Submit all technical information to the Editor.

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