

# Whales on Wheels

Number IV

Volume XXI

Whales on Wheels

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## Your Ultra Van on the Cover of WOW

Would you like to see your Ultra Van on the cover of Whales on Wheels? Then send in a photo, with a short story. The photo should have some artistic value featuring the Ultra Van in a good location. Send your photos and stories to the Editor and have your Ultra Van be a star!



*Part of the group of 60 plus Ultra Van MCC members who attended the year 2000 National Rally are shown here in the Amana Church. Notice that the men are sitting on the right side of the hall and the women are sitting on the left side, just the way that church members were required to do back in the last century.*

## YEAR 2000 Ultra Van NATIONAL RALLY

at Amana, Iowa  
September 19th  
through 24th.

There were 25 Ultra Vans and at least 6 other brands of RV's in attendance at the Amana, Iowa Ultra Van Nat. Convention / Rally this year. With an average of 2.2 persons per RV, we had a very well attended event this year.



*Diane Galli and Nancy Pratt talk to the owner of this freshly restored Ultra Van at the 2000 Nationals. The owner had done the finishing touches on the Ultra Van just the night before he left from Michigan to drive to the nationals. This new editor now realizes why your other editor Christy Barden always walked around with a tape recorder, so he could record names and serial numbers of owners and Ultra Vans that he took pictures of. If the owner of this really nice Ultra Van will write or call me, I will provide information in the next issue of Whales on Wheels. I apologize.*

There were 25 Ultra Vans at the 2000 Ultra Van national Convention this year. There were also at least 6 other brands of RV's there plus numerous cars and rental cars driven in by members such as Graham Dell and his wife who flew in to Iowa from Seattle, Washington. Although the weather was wet most of the week, the group enjoyed being together for the numerous activities planned for us by our hosts, Dr. Ron and Martha Zoutendam.

The photos in this article do not show anything but sunny skies, but that is because your editor did not carry his fancy camera around in the rain. And boy, did it ever rain on us at times! On Friday morning when we were on our way to see the Czech Museum and the Vixen RV Dealership, it rained so much that water ran in over the tops of our shoes while we were walking from the meeting hall to several Ultra Vans that were driving to Cedar Rapids, Iowa to see the Museum.



*In this photo, part of the Ultra Van owners at the year 2000 Ultra Van Nationals week are watching an Amana Colony tinsmith make candle holders and other useful household items from sheets of tin and solder. After this demonstration, the tinsmith donated several of his projects to the drawing that Hosts Ron and Martha Zoutendam provided to the attendees. Gayle Finch won the really nice candleholder.*

Fortunately, most of our activities were inside except for running across the parking lot to the meeting hall and to our Ultra Vans.

One Ultra Van from Florida had incorporated a 4,000 watt alternator-generator in the engine compartment of his unit. The generator was driven off the crankshaft rear pulley like an air conditioner compressor would be driven. We will have to find out if it can drive his roof air unit while he is on the highway. More about that later.

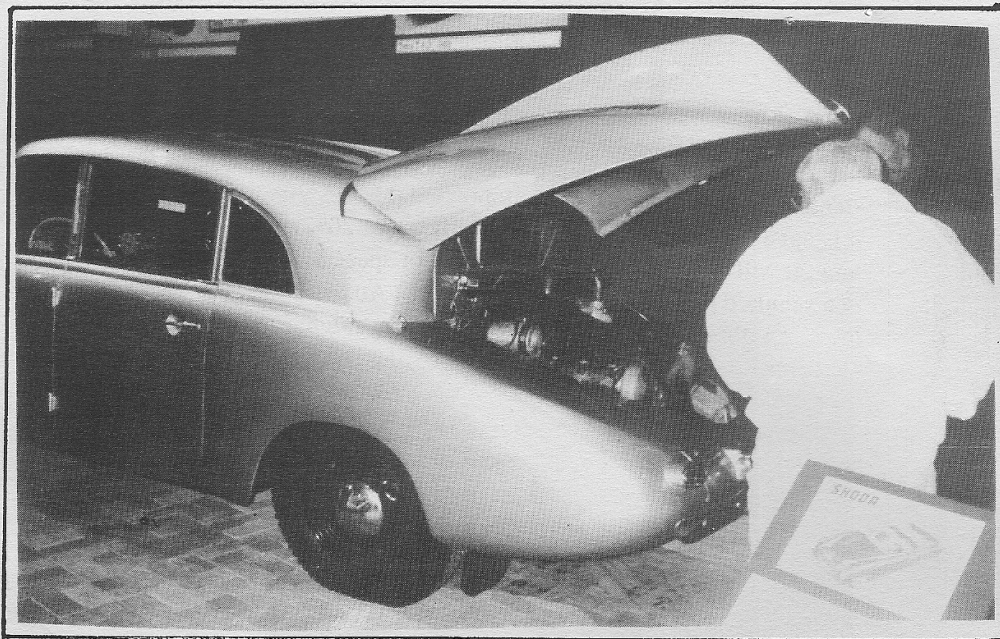


Your editor was privileged to ride in two Ultra Vans during the week at the Amana Colonies. Jean McMasters volunteered his Ultra S/N 330 to carry extra people to Cedar Rapids to the Museum and to Mechanicsville to the Vixen Dealer and I was given a ride in his very high-mileage but very sound RV. Jean has installed a Corvette power steering unit in his Ultra and it works very smoothly. Maybe Jean will write a tech tip again for many of the new ultra Van owners who would like to have better steering in our Ultra Vans.

*"The Hair of the Dog That Bit You" or more accurately, the horns of the deer that hit this Ultra Van are wired to the spare tire rack. Luckily, the spare tire provided most of the protection to the front of the Iowa-based Ultra Van. The left headlight was knocked out of its socket and the turning signal light was broken, but the deer was not so lucky, obviously. This Ultra Van is powered by a 321 cubic inch Buick V-6 engine, odd-fire version.*

Your editor was also given a ride to the Saturday noon banquet by Clyde and Kaye Stanton in their S / N 392 ultra Van. Clyde and Kaye have made numerous improvements in their RV and it would be great if Clyde or Kaye could write articles about the many improvements they have made in # 392. If you have a chance to take a tour of their # 392, be sure to take a good look because they have really made lots of thoughtful improvements.

Clyde and Kay Stanton have a very nice Ultra Van. The front Ultra Van pictured on page 10, the back cover of this issue of WOW is the one belonging to the Stantons. They have added many conveniences to their unit and your new editor would like to have Clyde or Kay write articles for WOW that describe the improvements that they have made. For instance, they have changed the Ford Econoline parking brake to a driver's seat base mounted Corvair parking brake handle. It looks like it works better than the Ford unit. They have also converted their bed in the rear to a gas-cylinder lifted air mattress and it looks like a factory installation.



*Shown here is a Czech Tatra air cooled V-8 engine powered car that we saw in the Museum in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The engine is mounted much like an early model Corvair power-train with the engine behind the rear axle. CORSA Technical counselor Larry Claypool has one of his restored Tatra automobiles in the museum. It was a 4 door car and was displayed just in front of the Tatra shown here.*

**Ron and Martha Zoutendam** really put on a very good Ultra Week this past September. They had planned the week very well and had events to keep us busy almost every minute. On Tuesday evening, we were treated to violin solos by the very pretty 10 year-old granddaughter of Theresa Vandersteeg (s/n 331 ) and violin solos by 87 year-old Chance Fitzgerald (s/n 286A).

There was a get-acquainted program and everyone was given the opportunity to introduce themselves and tell where they were from.

On Wednesday morning, we had a coffee and cookies meeting and then the men and women were treated to technical sessions while the women were treated to crafts and make-up sessions. There were the mandatory East and West business meetings and a number of club improvements were suggested.

**On Thursday**, the group met to tour the Amana Colonies. First, we assembled at the Amana Visitors Center just across the road from the RV park and we saw a movie about the history of the Amana Colonies.

Then we gathered in Ultra Vans and private autos for the 6 to 8 mile tour around the colonies. Although in the current times, the Colonies appear to be very clean and tidy and prosperous, 100 or more years ago they were anything but free and easy going as we are used to in modern times.

The Colonies were essentially a communal style of living in order to exist and to not go hungry. But they did exist and even started an Appliance factory. All of us have heard of or have owned Amana refrigerators that are made in the Colonies.

On Friday, our group braved the pouring rain and climbed into Ultra Vans and private vehicles for the trip to Cedar Rapids and to Mechanicsville, IA. The Czech Museum is located in Cedar Rapids and the Vixen RV dealer is located just outside Mechanicsville.

While at the museum we saw that Larry Claypool of CORSA, had put one of his TATRA automobiles in the museum. The Tatra is a Czech manufactured automobile that incorporates air cooled engines similar to the Corvair engine an even has V-8 air cooled engines in the rear of their cars similar to our American made early model Corvairs with the swing axles.

We also saw a very pretty 4 passenger motorcycle with a single cylinder engine of about 15 horsepower. It was equipped with two transmissions, presumably for getting into a very low gear for hauling 4 passengers up steep hills.

## VIXEN RV's

One of the neatest activities of the week in Iowa was our visit to the Vixen RV Dealership.

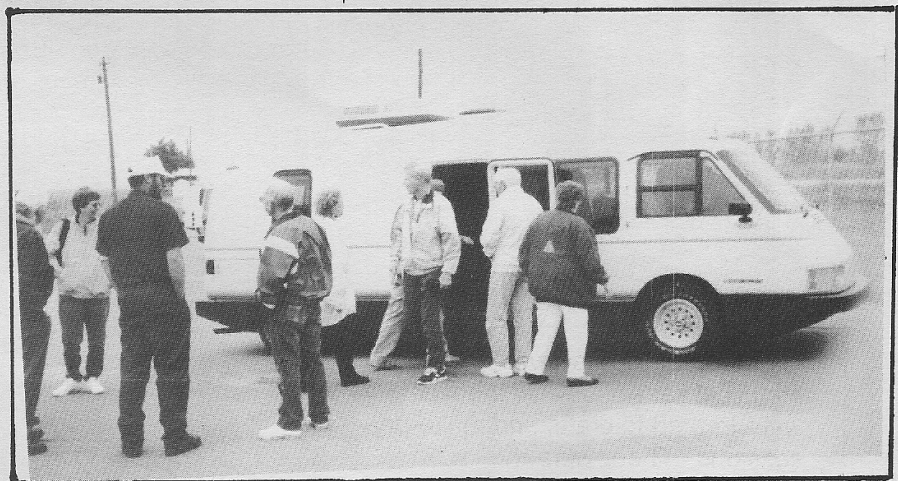
The Vixen is an RV that was designed to fit, if tightly, in a standard garage. It is low enough that it will just clear a standard garage door when it is open and at 20 feet long, it will just barely fit in a standard garage if there is nothing else in the garage before you shut the door.

The Vixen RV's were built with BMW 6 cylinder diesel engines for power, mounted in the rear (just where RV engines belong the editor says!). Some of the last ones built were equipped with good old GM Buick 3800 V-6 engines mounted in the rear with GM Hydromatic transmissions. If you move a front wheel drive engine to the rear, it still makes the vehicle go forward in forward gear. You just have to tie the steering tie rods down so that it does not have rear wheel steering.

The Vixen is a very nice looking, modern design rig, but all of us Ultra Van people that toured the units were impressed that the Vixen has only about 20% as much floor space as our Ultra Vans. And you can not stand up straight in a Vixen. So the Buick V-6 powered unit you see in the picture below had a mate that had a screened-in pop up roof like a VW Van. We all thought that a RV of that status looked cheap with a pop top.

The Vixen makes a very nice airport limo and a nice short trip RV, but none of us could imagine being a full-time RV'er in a Vixen.

The Vixen body is fiberglass and the frame is a very heavy steel structure. We did not find out what the empty weight was, but it is sure a lot more than our 3,500 lb. Ultra Vans.



*One of the field trips at the convention was to visit a VIXEN motor home dealer in Mechanicsville, Iowa. Here, Ultra Van owners look at a Vixen that is powered by a Buick 3800 V-6 engine and GM automatic transaxle mount in the rear. Vixens are very pretty, but we all agreed that they are very cramped inside compared to our wonderful Ultra Vans. No one bought a Vixen on this visit !!*

The Pratts have restored their Ultra Van so that it is almost exactly like it was back in 1968 when it was built in Hutchinson, Kansas.

Their solution to the transportation problem after they get to the RV park and hook up to the water and etceteras, is to carry along a couple of bicycles as you see here in the photo. The bicycles also solve the problem of getting enough fresh air, sunshine and exercise.

You may have discovered that you can see a lot more of the local scenery by walking or riding a bike than if you are riding in a taxi or driving a car. Check with the Pratts to see how they attach the bike carrier to their Ultra Van.



*Here is Doug and Nancy Pratt's Ultra Van S/N 373 with the lovely white oak interior. They usually carry a pair of bicycles on a rack attached to the trailer hitch so they can explore their surroundings without disconnecting each time. The fresh air and exercise is a very good side benefit too.*



*In the last issue of WOW we had an article by Bob Galli about his satellite TV dish. Here is Bob and Diane's Ultra Van S/N 504 with their dish set up behind it and pointed to the East. Another dish belonging to another Ultra Van is also shown in the foreground in this picture. The Jim and Marlene Craigs also had a dish mounted on the ground beside their S/N 604 at the Amana National Rally.*

The Gallis have solved the problem of keeping up with the latest news, sports and gardening tips by adapting a satellite dish to the TV and VCR in their motor home. The solution of how to keep the satellite dish from blowing over in the wind is solved by the placement of two plastic milk cartons filled with water on the plywood sheet that mounts the dish. When they get home from a trip, they simply re-mount the dish on the roof of their carport and then they have satellite TV in their home.

In order to aim the dish properly at each RV stop, they just key in the nearest Postal Zip Code into the Satellite box that comes with the dish.

## The Trip to Amana, Iowa

Gayle and I left our house in Tularosa, New Mexico at 1:30 PM on Sunday afternoon on September 17th, year 2000. The temperature was 80 degrees and there was a slight westerly breeze. We stopped at our local Subway Sandwich shop and bought lunch to eat as we drove to our planned first night stop in Dalhart, Texas.

The Corvair engine in our Ultra Van is just barely broken in since I overhauled it right after we bought the Ultra Van in August 1998. We have driven to Seattle, WA, Fort Worth, TX and to Lake Tahoe, NV since the overhaul, putting about 10,000 miles on the engine.

There had been a hurricane reported in the Gulf of Mexico as we departed New Mexico on Sunday afternoon. As we drove across Eastern New Mexico and into the Texas Panhandle, the weather was pretty nice, but it started getting warmer. We stayed in an RV Park in Dalhart, Texas on Sunday night and then broke camp and started driving down the road toward the Oklahoma Panhandle on Monday morning. We noticed that the wind was picking up and blowing from the South East as we neared Oklahoma.

By the time we entered Oklahoma, I was having to hold the Ultra Van steering wheel nearly 90 degrees to the right to counter the severe cross wind that was blowing. My main thought was that my nearly new tires on the front were being scrubbed clean of all their tread! It felt like we were being pulled sideways on the blacktop highway. As it turned out after the trip, there was no noticeable wear of the front tires. I am still amazed at the lack of tread wear.

We continued across Kansas to a town called Pratt, Kansas and stopped for gas and to eat at a Sonic Drive In. By noon in Pratt, KS, the wind was blowing at 30 plus miles per hour from our right and the temperature was up to 95 degrees. It was not nearly as pleasant as it had been when we started the trip in New Mexico. Just because we detoured at Pratt, KS and drove up to Hutchinson, KS so our S/N 443 Ultra Van could go back home to "her" birthplace. We drove by the airport in Hutchinson, but did not drive to the actual Ultra Van Factory site. Probably next year we will stay a night in Hutchinson.

We continued from Hutchinson, KS to Salina, Topeka and through Kansas City, MO, and on to a small town in MO where we stopped for the night again. All the while the wind was blowing 30 to 40 mph from the South-East and the temperature was 95 degrees.

On Tuesday morning, we broke camp, stopped at a crafts warehouse, filled the Ultra Van with gas and headed North-East toward Iowa and the Amana Colonies. As we drove into Iowa with a 35 mile per hour tail wind, it began to rain and turn cooler. Remember the Hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico? Well, that was where the wind was coming from. As we got to Iowa, the rain was steady and the temperature was dropping to the 40's.

On our un-eventful trip home, we experienced night time temperatures in the mid-thirties, and of course, I had forgotten to install the heater hoses before the trip!



*Here is our Ultra Van S/N 443 stopped under the awning at a Sonic Drive In in Pratt, Kansas, just 60 miles south-west of where Ultra Vans were built in Hutchinson, Kansas. After we ate lunch here on the way to Amana, Iowa, we drove to Hutchinson, Kansas and drove by the airport where the Ultra Vans were manufactured. One of the Many good things about owning an Ultra Van is that you can drive them almost anywhere that you can drive a car or van because they are compact.*

**Year 2001 Ultra Van Week** will be held at Minden, Nebraska during September 10th through 16th next year. Minden, Nebraska is in nearly the geographical center of the U.S. and hopefully this location will make it easier for many Ultra Van owners who want to attend because it is closer to many of us.

The attraction at Minden, NB is a museum of American heritage things and it is so big that it usually takes two or three days to see it all. We will be camping on the grounds of the museum and there is a motel right beside the RV park. Gayle and I stopped by there on our way home from Amana, Iowa and it took us about one day to drive home to New Mexico from there.



*Harold "Hal" Pickering of Tularosa, New Mexico stands beside one of his two Ultra Vans and beside his self-built house that is barely visible in this picture. The house is to the left and the second Ultra Van is barely visible behind the one in the foreground.*

## Where is your Ultra Van Stored and Maintained?

**Starting with** this issue, I am going to publish articles about our members and where they store and maintain their Ultra Vans. There should be some very interesting stories about our members and where they keep their Ultra Vans running in spite of the fact that we have no dealers or service centers around the country like the newer brands have.

This edition, we will be able to read about an Ultra Van owner and his wife who do EVERYTHING themselves ! They even built their own house and carved a place to live out of the land. They are Harold "Hal" and Tote Pickering of Tularosa, New Mexico and they own two Ultra Vans.

=====

**Hal and Tote Pickering** who own Ultra Vans S/N 271 and S/N 294, store their two Ultras in the gravel driveway on the East side of their very unique house.

About 18 years ago, Hal and Tote bought several acres of land in the foothills of the Sacramento Mountains near Tularosa, and White Sands, New Mexico. To get to the property, you had to ford a sizable creek and you still ford it but now it is concrete lined so you don't get stuck in the gravel and mud.

First, they moved an antique one-bedroom trailer house on to the property, then they started carving out a floor plan for a house that they would eventually build out of native materials and that would be built partially into a hill side. The North and West walls of the house are built into the dirt and stone hillside. The South and East side of the house are mostly glass and are open to the wonderful New Mexico scenery.

The roof of the house is built out of local trees that form the rafters of the house. Tote and some local craftsmen laid the tile floor. The Pickering's New Mexico house is truly a house built out of local materials.

The coincidental thing about the Pickering's living in this area of New Mexico is that there are only 3 Ultra Vans in the whole State, and with The Finch's S/N 443, all 3 are within 5 miles of each other.

The Pickering's address is 45 Helms Road, Tularosa, NM 88352-0100.

*Note: There are many owners who have special places to work on their Ultra Vans. For instance, one or more owners have drive-over pits to get underneath and there are other owners who have custom built fully enclosed garages for their Ultra Vans. Next issue there will be a photo on a \$2,700. drive on hoist. Please send pictures and a story about your Ultra Van work and storage space.  
The editor.....*



## Letters to the Editor

This section will be reserved each issue so that members can express their views about Ultra Van ownership, operation and to report on interesting trips made in our great RV's. Gayle and I drove our S/N 443 to Bisbee, Arizona this month and stayed two nights at the Shady Dell RV park there. It was a very enjoyable and relaxing stop and in the next issue of Whales on Wheels we will write a report about the visit there. In the mean-time, I encourage other people to send in articles and reports for this quarterly news letter so that you all don't have to read just my reports each issue.

## WHAT IS IT ?

In the last issue of Whales on Wheels, I showed a Model T Ford, 1924 year model, and explained that I will show unusual RV's in future issues and ask our members if they can identify them. In this issue, I will give you a clue about the RV shown below. It sleeps 8 (eight) people. If you know about it, write and let your editor know so that it can be explained in the Winter 2001 issue of WOW.



DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS VEHICLE IS ?

## Classified

*1967 Ultra Van S/N 294 Clean condition, roof air conditioner, 140 hp engine, bumpers, air horns, tow bar brackets, Ryerson Manual, spare engine, spare Powerglide transmission, many spare parts, second owner. Hal Pickering, 1-505-585-2503 Tularosa, NM \$ 7,500.00 obo.*

*Wanted to buy:  
Corvaire hubcaps, ( 4 ) 1-505-585-2503*

*There were no other classified ads submitted for this issue of WOW. If you have ads to submit, mail the info to the editor ASAP !!!*

## More Classifieds

**1967 Ultra Van S/N 321.** New front end, new brakes, new tires, new three angle valve job. Engine lowered for better u-joint wear, table, factory trailer hitch, 40 K miles, asking \$6,550. Contact Jean McMasters, 916 Lighthouse Drive, N. Palm Beach, Florida 33048. Phone 1-407-626-0338

**Want to buy an Ultra Van.** Contact the manager of the Ventura Beach RV Resort, 800 West Main Street, Ventura, CA. 93001. Phone 1-805-643-9137, ask for Sandie Murphy

## News of Members

**Paolo Galli**, 18 years old, and his Dad and Granddad, hauled Paolo's 24 ft. long Travelon from Joshua Tree to Paolo's home in Atascadero, CA the day after the Palm Springs GWFBT & SM. in November.

**Louis Griggs** continues to be plagued with complications from his recent illness. Write to Louis and Mabel and wish them well

**Corvaire Society of America (CORSA)**  
P.O. Box 607, Lemont, Illinois 60439-0607  
(708) 257-6530

## Rallies

Jan 17 - 20, 2001, Western Winter Rally, Phoenix, AZ. Hope Church, 4842 North 51 Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85031 (623) 846-7785. Hosts: Dan & Betty Reinhardt, 5201 West Camelback Rd, #A255, Phoenix, AZ 85031 (623) 846-6920.

April 20 - 22, Spring Fling in the South, Hopkins, South Carolina. Hosts, Dennis and Linda Radford, & Jean McMasters. More info later.

April 25 - 29, 2001, Space Odyssey 2001, Tularosa, New Mexico. Visit the Space Center Museum, White Sands National Monument, a 140 year-old historical village. Room for 12 to 16 Ultra Vans with elect and water hook-ups and dump station. Hosts, Richard and Gayle Finch, 1-505-585-8035, Tularosa, NM.

June 17 - 24, 2001, 2001 Round Lake Ontario Rally, Lake Ontario, US & Canada. Four day tour around Lake Ontario, join wherever you want, depart wherever. Hosts, Nancy and Doug Pratt, Marion & Norm HelmKay. More info later, ( sounds great !)

September 10 - 16, 2001, Ultra Week 2001, Minden, Nebraska Pioneer Village, site of the 1985 Ultra Week. Visit an American Heritage Historic Museum and Village. Hosts, Richard and Gayle Finch. Send sase for info package, 1-505-585-8035

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 VAN. This 22 foot unique motor home was designed by David Peterson and built in Kansas until 1970. About 365 units were built. Dues are \$6.00 annually, please remit to the Secretary-Treasurer. Submit all technical information to the Editor.

### PRESIDENT

Bob Galli #504  
5000 Cascabel  
Atascadero, CA 93422  
(805) 466-7237  
rdgalli@tcsn.net

### VICE-PRESIDENT

Graham Dell #292  
4332 157th Ave SE  
Bellevue, WA 98006  
(206) 641-1570  
grahamdell@aol.com

### SEC.-TREASURER

Louis Griggs #334  
626 Brookfield Ave.  
Cumberland, MD 21502  
(301) 722-2991

### Editor

Richard Finch # 443  
1418 Apple Avenue  
Tularosa, NM 88352  
(505) 585-8037  
finchbird@juno.com

### DIRECTORS

#### Eastern

Norm HelmKay #356, #486  
RR# 1, Carrying Place  
ONT KOK 1 LO. Canada  
(613) 394-3054  
normvair@fan.net

#### Western

Dan Davis #468  
4509 Interlake Ave N  
Seattle, WA 98103  
dandavis@w-link.net

**E-Mail Guy:** Ken Wildman #338, 419 N. Johnson Street, Ada, Ohio 45810  
(419) 634-4874 E-mail: k-wildman@onu.edu

Web site: <http://www.onu.edu/user/FS/kwildman/ultraVan.html>

# GROUP ULTRA VAN

Richard Finch, Editor  
1418 Apple Avenue  
Tularosa, NM 88352

*A caravan of Ultra Vans is lined up here with owners standing in the street at the left. They are getting ready to visit a museum in the Amana Colonies during the 2000 Ultra Van Rally Week.*



**FIRST CLASS MAIL**

Norm & Marion HelmKay  
73 Sargent Street

Haines City

FL 33844

Whales on Wheels

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