

The Ultra Van Page

Lightweight ultra van of the future sets up camp on the web



The 1968 Ultra Van is now owned by Ed and June Lindsey of Pensacola, Florida.

BY MIKE BUMBECK

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF KEN WILDMAN

We don't usually spout superlatives, but of this we are certain: The Ultra Van is the world's largest Corvair. This cavernous Corvair, officially recognized by the Corvair Society of America (CORSA), is technically not a car, but rather a motorhome. The brainchild of aircraft designer David Peterson, the Ultra Van body is a monocoque aluminum and fiberglass composite structure. The middle is constructed of aluminum like an airplane fuselage, while the rounded ends are reinforced fiberglass.

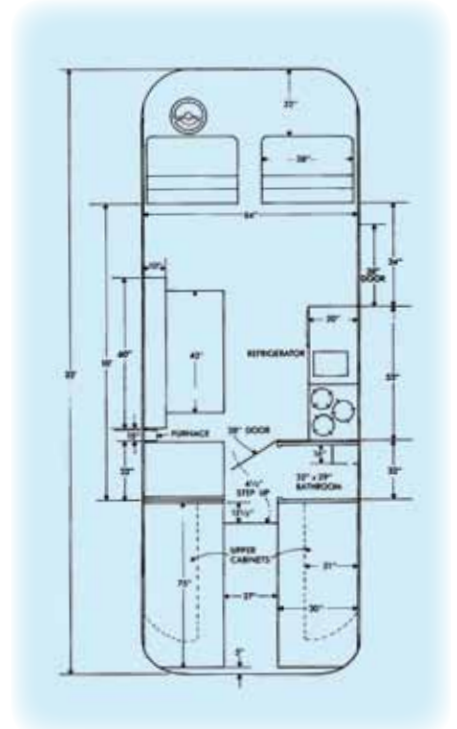
That we know any of this comes thanks to the website known as The Ultra Van Page, which is the web destination and information portal for all things Ultra Van. The site was created back in the olden days of the internet by Ken Wildman, the former owner of the 1968 Ultra Van on the front page. Ken built the site in late 1994 as a self-imposed assignment to learn html. The Ultra Van Page has since grown to encompass everything there is to know about the unique motor coach short of owning one.

Motorhomes are conventionally built atop bare conventional commercial

truck frame and chassis. Ultra Van pioneer David Peterson set out to build a lightweight, space efficient motorhome of the future. David realized the compact flat-six engine with transaxle was the perfect powerplant when Chevrolet announced the Corvair in 1959. The Ultra Van weighed about 3,000 pounds fully equipped—about 500 pounds less than a 1962 Chevrolet Impala sedan.

After an initial run of 15 Ultra Vans were produced in California during the early '60s through a student apprentice program, production was moved to the wartime aircraft production hub of Hutchinson, Kansas. Eight units a month were rolling out of an airplane hangar by 1966. Around 370 Ultra Vans were built, with more than 200 of them still roaming the roads. Production continued on until 1970.

The independent suspension supplied a car-like ride on passenger car tires. The Corvair engine-equipped Ultra Vans could cruise comfortably at 60 miles per hour and deliver a respectable 15 MPG. As Corvair production ended, a small batch of about 40 Ultra Vans were fitted with small-block Chevrolet V-8 engines



and rear ends sourced from Corvettes. While CORSA recognized the Ultra Van as a Corvair, it remains to be seen if the Corvettes and Ultra Vans can officially co-exist.

The Ultra Van Motor Coach Club (UVMCC) was formed in 1966. The Ultra Archives were created in 1989 under the stewardship of Norm Helmkey, automotive historian and author of *Motorhome of the Future, Built in the Past*—available for reading on the Ultra Van Page, and the source of many facts here. Thanks to the efforts of Ken, Norm, and the UVMCC, the Ultra Van Page carries on collective knowledge surrounding one of the most unique and innovative motorhomes ever made. 🏠

Quick Facts

URL: www.corvair.org/chapters/ultravan

Type: Informational, historical
Focus: RVs powered by a Chevrolet Corvair engine

Registration: Not required

Family rating: G

Hemmings rating: ★★★