

Love

and

HATE

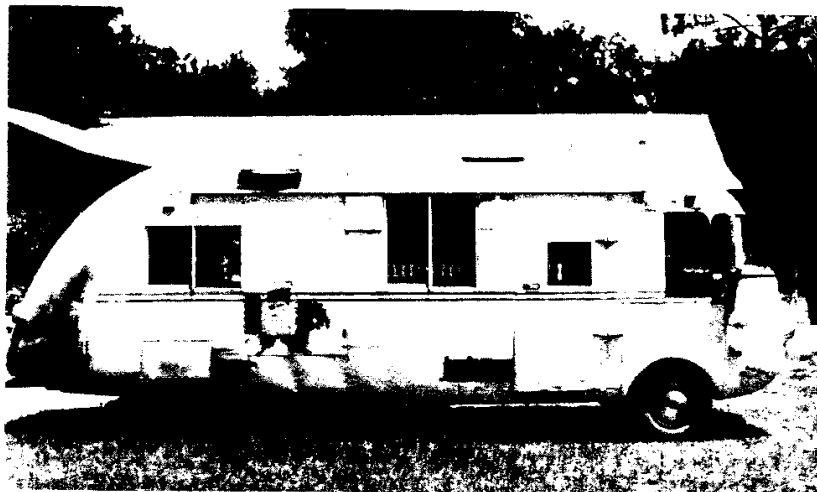
Bill Welle

When first I laid eyes on her, I turned her down flat. Can you blame me? There she sat, in somebody's back yard, in a gritty little mining town in northern Alabama. She had dozens of pock marks and was peeling here and there. Her rear end sagged a bit, too. She was only about 25, but she looked fifty! I was told she spent eleven long years in a Wisconsin cornfield hosting a family of squirrels.

And yet, it seemed to me at least, she had pleasing lines with all the curves in the right places. I thought of the old saying, "Built for comfort, not for speed." My wife (a horsewoman) spoke of another old saying: "It looks like she was rode hard and put up wet."

But all the way home I couldn't put her out of my mind. I had been allowed first refusal, so as soon as I said no, she already belonged to someone else. That someone turned out to be a retired airline pilot who soon found out that he couldn't keep the likes of her in his posh Goldcoast neighborhood. So I got a second chance, and this time I swiftly presented my check and UltraVan #211 was mine, all mine!

Well, all that took place about four years ago and I have to admit, she was trouble almost from the beginning. In fact, on the way home, my volunteer copilot (a retired Marine fighter pilot who must have been looking for a few more thrills) almost blew us up in a gas station in northern Florida by pouring 16 gallons



of gas in the water tank that leaked like a sieve. Until then I had no idea how many people smoked when driving up to a gas pump, then just to be safe they throw the cigarette out! The whole thing looked like a Chinese fire drill, with me chasing people away from the pumps.

We drove the next few hours in total silence. As soon as we arrived home we shared a few double scotches and he quickly left. Come to think of it, I haven't seen much of him since.

Meanwhile, my wife (who happens to be very partial to fresh eggs) made a longer, more detailed appraisal of the coach and then suggested that when I was through fooling with it, she could convert it into a great chicken house. That simple statement spurred me on for years. And, of course there were times when the fun turned to drudgery and the love turned to hate.

I remember when hurricane Andrew threatened. 211 was perched precariously up on blocks while the universal joints were being replaced, all four of

them. Then there was the time I was redoing some wiring (there is a lot, it's 22 feet long). I added some that had already been done by someone else but routed elsewhere and reached the point where I could only shut the thing down by yanking the battery cables. Another time the chopper in the toilet malfunctioned; I think I better quit there. You get the picture, I'm sure.

Anyway, I learned about plumbing certainly, and wiring, bondo, body putty and epoxy, paint strippers, primers and painting. I learned to work with aluminum and fiberglass. I restored the interior as well as the exterior of this historic coach. It has been a great learning experience and I must have done it right because whenever I exhibit number 211 at car shows, it almost always gets an award.

Along the way I joined the UltraVan Club and go to their rallies. Next I joined the local Corvair Club (Gulf Coast Corvairs) and attended their shows, and then I became a member of CORSA. Soon I hope to make it to the National. With this unique vehicle, I can drive to the show, live in it during the trip, and then show it. Incidentally, my wife, who often travels with me, still buys eggs in the supermarket!

History

This was the 22nd and last coach built by David Petersen in Oakland, California. It was a final prototype and completed in 1965. The company was then sold to Jack Tillotson who began production in Hutchinson, Kansas where about 300 UltraVans were built. Tillotson drove #211 from Oakland to Hutchinson, loading the 3,000 pound vehicle with 6,000 pounds of factory jigs, patterns, and molds (It has a small but permanent sag in the middle!). It then served as a company demonstrator and is pictured in several sales brochures. Eventually it was sold and went through a succession of private owners; I bought it in 1991.

