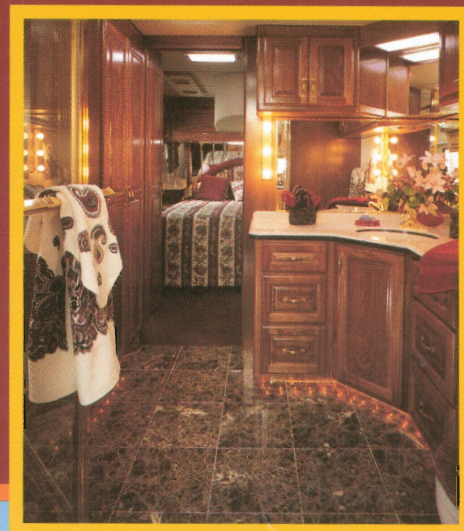


FAMILY MOTOR COACHING

See page 130
for more on Vogue



Official Publication of
The Family Motor Coach Association
April 1994 Vol. 31 No. 4



Testing Today's Vogue
By Mitchell

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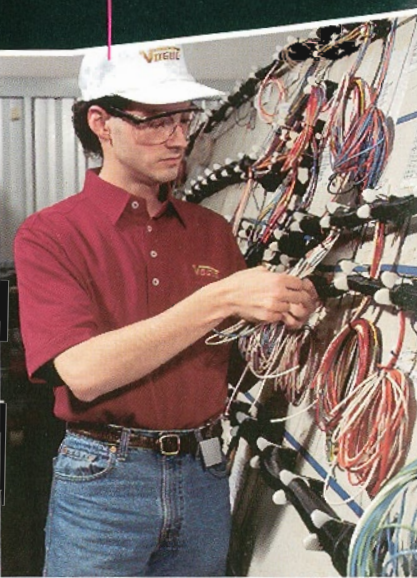
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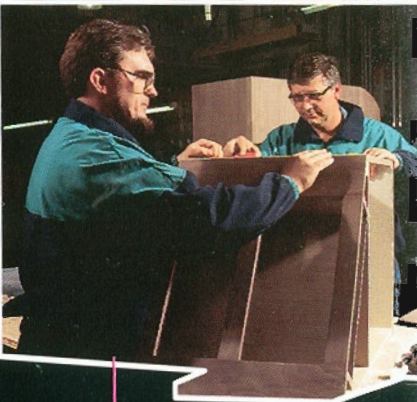
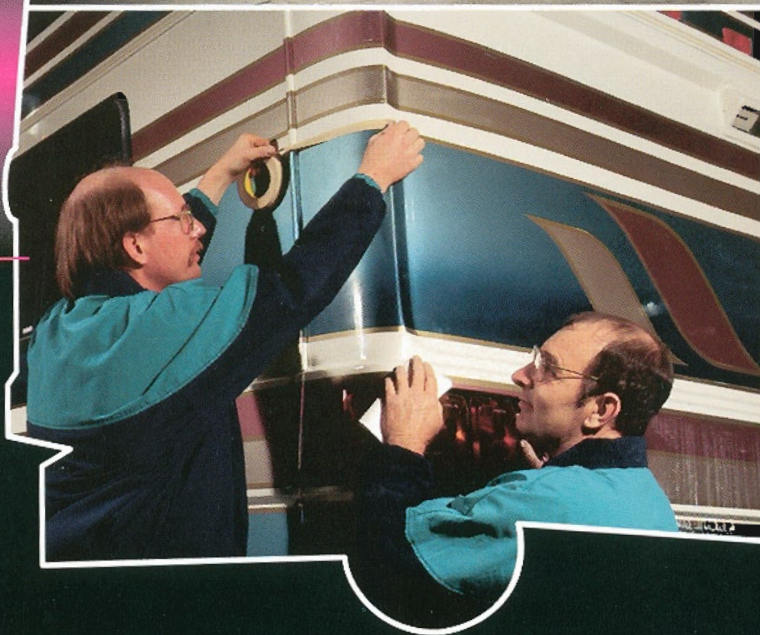
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The Resurgence Of Vogue



Thanks to Harvey Mitchell, a former dealer of luxury motor coaches, Vogue motorhomes are still rolling off the production line, and offering stiff competition for manufacturers of coaches in the high-end segment of the marketplace.

By **DON MAGARY**

Shhhhhhh . . . Don't tell anyone. The best-kept secret in the luxury motor coach industry is the splendid job that Harvey Mitchell has done with Vogue.

The once prestigious line of motorhomes fell on hard times in the late 1980s, and the quality of the product suffered — or, more probable, the company fell on hard times because the quality had suffered. When I last tested a Vogue in 1989, my impression was that the motorhome was overpriced and under-engineered. The pride of craftsmanship and pacesetter styling that had been the hallmark of Vogue in its glory days under the watchful eye of founder and entrepreneur Audie Auburn had faded. Frankly, I wasn't surprised when the company filed bankruptcy. I was surprised, however, to learn that Harvey Mitchell, a renowned dealer

of luxury motor coaches, had purchased the assets of Vogue from the bankruptcy court. What does a dealer know about manufacturing RVs, I wondered.

So when the editor of *Family Motor Coaching* magazine assigned me to test the Vogue Prima Vista by Mitchell, I didn't know what to expect, but the earlier test lingered in my mind. My son was out of school for a few days, so we left the Phoenix area and drove toward southern Arizona for a week of camping, testing, and taking in a few of the more remote golf courses that we hadn't yet tried. Along the way, I found out what a dealer knows about manufacturing RVs.

The only similarities between this 40-foot Prima Vista motorhome and the Vogue I tested a few years ago were the name on its side and the distinctive porthole window on its entry door. On my scale of one to 10, the Vogue by Mitchell rates a 10. It

falls into the top one percent of all motorhomes that I have tested over the past 10 years. And while the coach is not inexpensive, I believe the buyer is getting a good value. Quality craftsmanship and reliability do not come cheap.

Our test unit was a 40-foot Class A with a 350-horsepower 3176 Caterpillar diesel pusher engine. The base suggested retail price of the Prima Vista is \$320,000, but with the options included on our test unit, the price came up to \$345,000. The list of options included is as follows: Caterpillar 3176 350-horsepower engine with Jake Brake, Allison six-speed World Transmission, antilock brake system, computerized HWH levelers, insulated and tinted windows, garbage disposal, marble galley and bath floors, Splendide washer-dryer, Corian shower walls, freezer in compartment bay, electric barbecue grill, entertainment center with color TV.



Interior decorations and floor plans are subject to individual needs and tastes, so it's a matter of speculation as to whether everyone will agree with my satisfaction with this part of the coach. However, driving performance is less subjective, and I can almost promise you'll be satisfied, delighted, and thrilled after driving just a few miles.

Normally, I report on my driving impressions later in the article, but this time I can't wait. Driving and performance are superb. Vogue builds the 40-foot Prima Vista on its own 264-inch-wheelbase chassis, and the standard engine is a 300-horsepower Caterpillar; however, our test unit had an optional 350-horsepower model. This is augment-

ed by a six-speed automatic Allison World transmission and a 4.10:1 axle ratio. The unit has ABS brakes and utilizes a Jake Brake engine retarder. The ride is smoothed out by the eight-air-bag Ride-Well air suspension system augmented by a fully adjustable front suspension that includes Koni shock absorbers and

a full antisway bar.

Even though the Vogue weighs in at nearly 16 tons, it is not a lumbering giant. As a matter of fact, this diesel-powered motorhome moves exceptionally fast in both the low and high gear ranges. Our 0-mph-to-60-mph acceleration runs produced an impressive 32.37-second elapsed time. In the 40-to-60-mph acceleration tests, which simulate passing situations, the coach reached 60 mph in only 18.43 seconds. And I don't feel that the coach's lively spirit caused fuel economy to suffer. Over the course of the trip, which involved relatively flat terrain, the unit averaged 7.25 mpg. With a 150-gallon fuel tank, the driving range between fill-ups could exceed a thousand miles.

I cannot remember being more impressed with ride qualities than I was with this particular coach. It has

fall short of describing the pleasure of driving this coach; in many respects, it's an emotional experience rather than one that lends itself to technical explanation.

One important adjunct of piloting the coach is driver comfort. The Vogue didn't fall short here, either. From the large leather seat with six-way power adjustments to the leather-wrapped sports steering wheel, Prima Vista designers have made sure the driver is content.

In the same vein, the instrumentation clusters and operating switches are within comfortable view and reach of the driver. The Vogue may have the best-designed instrumentation panel I've seen. In most coaches you can view the most important gauges on the dash after some steering wheel adjustments, but in the Prima Vista you can see it all. The cockpit has an impressive list of fea-

and copilot's seats is a 19-inch color television — one of three televisions on board, if you're counting.

The outside of the Prima Vista has retained Vogue's heritage of its past glory days — you can tell it's a Vogue at a glance. But the modern custom paint graphics package lets you know that it's a 1994 model and not a 1970s model.

Exterior storage is abundant, with very large storage bays, including one large pass-through compartment. In one compartment the 7.8-kw diesel generator is mounted on its own air bags. Vogue designers have included many thoughtful touches that make being outside the coach as pleasant as being on the inside. This particular model came with a full awning package, a large freezer chest, an electric barbecue grill, and an entertainment center with a color television — leaving the owner hardly any reason to go inside.

In terms of livability, I thought the motorhome worked extremely well. This Prima Vista had what Vogue calls its 40-D floor plan, one of several floor plans available. The living area is immediately behind the cockpit, followed by the midcoach galley and dining area. Between the front area and the rear bedroom is the spacious bathroom. Among the functional and stylish features in the Prima Vista are the Corian countertops and marble floors in the galley and bath. The overall workmanship in the walnut woodwork and cabinetry is superior. This floor plan will sleep up to four people: two in the queen-size bed in the bedroom and two on the foldout sofa in the living area.

The living room, or parlor, as Vogue describes it, has a roadside sofa that is upholstered with a maroon and dark-blue paisley fabric. Across the aisle is a blue leather recliner chair. A large Corian-topped custom end table with a built-in magazine rack separates this recliner from the white leather upholstered copilot's seat. With the cockpit seats turned

spirit and responsiveness, both from a dead stop and in passing situations. The overall ride and handling are smooth. The Vogue climbs hills gingerly and requires very little effort to keep it heading toward your destination while running the freeways or trekking leisurely along the scenic byways. Superlatives and adjectives

tures, such as a CB radio, power leveling jacks, remote-controlled and heated exterior mirrors, a rearview television system and monitor, an AM/FM stereo radio and cassette deck, a VCR, and a multiplay compact disc player. In the console below the Corian drink holders that are positioned between the pilot's





rearward, the living room provides comfortable seating for six people. Since the living room is devoid of overhead cabinets, this area is especially open and roomy. The large tinted and insulated Thermopane windows are surrounded by arched padded gray leather valances with Tivoli mood lighting and covered with day-night shades. They also feature Corian windowsills. In fact, Corian trim is found throughout the coach.

As for the cabinetry in the rest of the coach, the extra-high, 6-foot-8-inch ceiling (6-foot-3-inch in the bedroom) allows for the installation of larger cabinets, thus providing more than enough storage, as well as a fashionable look.

One can't help but be impressed by the Prima Vista's galley-dining area. Special features include the marble floor, large Corian countertops, and, finally, the walnut dining table and chairs with upholstered seats. The amenities include a two-burner recessed range, microwave-convection oven, and a Dometic AES

three-way refrigerator-freezer and ice maker. The double-bowl Corian sink blends nicely into the spacious Corian countertops. One feature that the Vogue has that is rare in an RV is a garbage disposal. A filtered instant hot water faucet makes getting that first cup of coffee in the morning hassle-free.

Storage in the galley is exceptional, with many drawers and cabinets. All in all, the galley and dining area are extremely well-designed, providing plenty of work space for efficient meal preparation and comfortable dining.

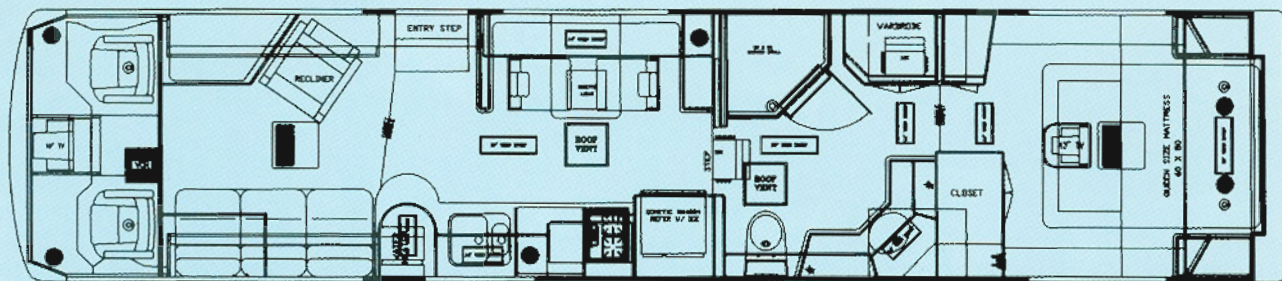
Moving aft toward the bedroom is the very large and well-designed bathroom. As one would expect, Corian is used extensively in the bath as well, for countertops, the lavatory, and trim. And the shower offers a special touch of elegance with its Corian walls and temperature control shower valve. The huge corner vanity boasts plenty of counter space around the lavatory, and there's ample storage both above and below. Adding to the lux-

urious feel of the coach, all faucets and accessories in the bath are brass. The toilet is an electronic-flush Microphor porcelain model with sprayer.

On the curbside wall of the bath area is a built-in linen closet and a large wardrobe with cedar lining. And, as an added convenience, the Prima Vista we tested was equipped with a Splendide washer-dryer unit. The bath earns rave reviews both for style and function.

The bedroom is imposing, too. Large cabinets frame the rear mirror over the head of the walk-around, queen-size bed, and nightstands are positioned on either side. Also, cabinets line both sides of the bedroom walls. There's even a large cedar-lined wardrobe in the forward wall that includes space for hanging clothes as well as several shelves.

The 13-inch television in the bedroom is hard to miss. It is centered over the bed in a custom cabinet covered with gray upholstery and attached to the ceiling. While this is



SPECIFICATIONS

Manufacturer . . . Mitchell Coach Manufacturing Co., P.O. Box 339, Pryor, OK 74362; (800) 237-8978, (918) 825-2105
Model . . . Prima Vista
Floor plan . . . 40-D
Chassis . . . Vogue by Mitchell
Engine . . . Caterpillar 3176, 10.3-liter; 350 horsepower at 1,800 rpm; 1,350 foot-pounds torque at 1,200 rpm
Transmission . . . Allison World 6-speed automatic
Axle ratio . . . 4.10 to 1
Wheelbase . . . 264 inches
Tires . . . 295/75R x 22.5 steel-belted radials
Brakes . . . ABS plus Jake Brake engine retarder
Suspension . . . Ridewell Air, four bags in front and four bags in rear
Alternator . . . 160 amps
Batteries . . . chassis — (1) heavy-duty

8D; house — (2) heavy-duty 4D
Steering . . . TRW Ross (power)
Gross combination weight rating (GCWR) . . . 39,000 pounds
Gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) . . . 34,000 pounds
Gross axle weight rating (GAWR) . . . front axle — 12,000 pounds; rear axle — 22,000 pounds
Wet weights . . . front axle — 9,800 pounds; rear axle — 22,000 pounds; total 31,800 pounds
Payload capacity . . . 2,200 pounds
Fuel capacity . . . 150 gallons
Fuel requirements . . . diesel
Fuel consumption . . . 7.25 mpg
Acceleration . . . 0 to 60 mph, 32.37 seconds; 40 to 60 mph, 18.43 seconds
Exterior length . . . 40 feet
Exterior height . . . 11 feet 5 inches (including roof airs)
Exterior width . . . 102 inches
Interior height . . . 81.5 inches (bed-room 75 inches)
Frame construction . . . 1 x 1/2-inch

tubular steel
Insulation . . . 1 1/2-inch polystyrene
Converter . . . 130 amps
Electrical service . . . 50-amp
Generator . . . 7.8-kw Power Tech diesel
Inverter . . . 2,500 watt
Water heater . . . 6 gallon electronic ignition
Water system type . . . demand
Furnace . . . 40,000-Btu Webasto heating system
Air conditioner . . . (2) 13,500-Btu ducted roof air with thermostat controls
Refrigerator . . . 3-way (electric, 12-volt, LP) with built-in ice maker
Toilet . . . electronic marine type, china
Coach warranty . . . 12 months/12,000 miles
Fresh water capacity . . . 100 gallons
Holding tank capacities . . . gray water, 60 gallons; black water, 40 gallons
Base suggested retail price . . . \$320,000
Price as tested . . . \$345,000

certainly an unusual touch, I didn't know whether I would care for the arrangement. But if you enjoy propping yourself up and watching television prior to turning in for the night, you couldn't ask for a better setup.

And speaking of watching television, our test unit came with a state-of-the-art Moto-Sat satellite dish. It is so automatic that all you have to do is turn it on, and the electronics raise the dish into position, search out satellites, and program the channels into your remote control. Nothing could be easier. You won't miss any of your favorite programs, no matter how far out into the boon-docks you travel. This system reaches skyward and brings the world into your motor coach — a jillion channels of it.

The Prima Vista is sturdily constructed, which is apparent by the extremely quiet ride — no rattles or

creaking. On the sidewalls, Vogue begins with 1 1/2-inch tubular steel frame with 1/2-inch block Styrofoam insulation secured between the frame with Morad adhesive. On each side of the frame 1/4-inch lauan is added. On the exterior side a sheet of Filon is added, and on the interior is the wall paneling, which varies depending on the decor, i.e., walnut, oak, etc. This package is then laminated together prior to adding the exterior fiberglass and paint. According to a Vogue spokesman, the roof is similarly constructed on a 2-inch-by-4-inch tubular steel frame. The interior is covered with the ceiling carpet material, and more insulation is added to the top prior to attaching the one-piece fiberglass roof.

The floor starts with a tubular steel frame covered on the top by a 1 1/2-inch sheet of fir and then 1/2-inch ACX plywood. Then, the padding

and carpet finishes the upper side of the floor. Underneath this frame facing the road is a sheet of Filon, which protects the unit from road damage and moisture. To complete the package, the front and rear molded fiberglass caps are added.

I'm not sure all RV dealers could have pulled it off, but as far as I am concerned, Harvey Mitchell made the transition from dealer to manufacturer with glorious success. So there, I guess the secret is out.

It's rare when I find nothing to criticize when testing a motorhome, but in this case my "gripe" bag came up empty. Does this mean I think this is the perfect coach. No — I'm still looking for that one. It does mean, however, that using many other fine coaches I have tested as a standard, the Vogue by Mitchell holds its own and even comes out above some of the more familiar names. 