



Photo illustration by Ed Zajac

Hotel Les Lemonstar

By Bill Lanphier

No matter. What Ed lacks in attentiveness to automotive upkeep, he makes up for in outstanding photo illustrations, many of which have appeared in *ATV Action*. Note the handsome beak he has attached to that elephantine head.

When I arrive at a riding area with my Lemonstar, I go through an involved setup ritual that rivals a lunar landing for complexity. Sure, everyone thinks I'm nuts, but at least I'm

comfortable. First, I find a relatively level spot with my sliding door facing camp. If I can orient my van so the rear faces east, this is a bonus. I have no idea why I like this. It must have something to do with astrology or a similar mental disorder.

Then, using a small round level, I attempt to get the van perfectly level, which is important for health reasons. Doctors have concluded that if you fall asleep with your head lower than your feet, your brain fills up with blood and explodes. Ouch!

So, if the van isn't level, I pull out my shovel, dig a shallow depression in front of whichever wheel is too high and then roll into it. It's not easy to get the van absolutely level. Sometimes I'll alternately dig and then fill up holes for half an hour. My riding buddies are really polite and pretend not to notice my compulsive digging. Finally, I Velcro my black-out curtains to the windows. *Voila!* Hotel Les Lemonstar is ready for occupancy!

Lemonstar does make the perfect hotel. But life at the Lemonstar hasn't been without misadventures. Many are weather related. Before I realized that two sleeping bags (one inside the other or one on top of the other) can keep a body plenty warm, I operated a small Coleman white gas heater. To provide the required ventilation, I left two windows open a crack, but the heater still made the van smell awful. I'd fall asleep, only to wake up 30 minutes later dreaming that the heater had set fire to the van and I was trapped inside my Lemonstar barbecue.

One freezing night in the desert, Bobaloo, a dune buddy with only a tent, announced that he was moving into my van to keep warm. Bobaloo is huge, and his loud snoring sounds remarkably like a Honda ATC350X. All that night, I had the recurring dream that a four-stroke was running over my head.

My van is much more wind resistant than a tent. But, when the wind really howls, sand is displaced. The soft sand blows out from underneath the wheels on the windward side, eventually leaving only a pillar of sand holding up each wheel. Finally, the pillar collapses, that side of the vehicle drops a foot or so, and the process begins again. As one terribly windy night wore on, the left side of my van dropped down many times. By morning, the van was almost on its side. This gives new meaning to the phrase "rolling out of bed."

Usually, though, my Lemonstar is quite comfy—when I can get inside of it to go to sleep. Before turning in, I change out of my riding gear and into boxer shorts. Then I rush outside to brush my teeth before I freeze to death in my shorts.

My old Caravan didn't have electric door locks, but my Lemonstar does. One very cold and damp night at the Pismo Beach Dunes, I went outside in my shorts to brush my teeth and closed the door of the brand-new van behind me, not realizing that the door can lock automatically when it is closed. Boy, was that "click" a depressing sound.

So, at 1:30 in the morning, I was locked out of my van, freezing in my shorts, and the rest of the camp had turned in long ago. Rather than die in the sand next to my Lemonstar or break a window to get back in, I banged on the door of a friend's trailer and borrowed a wire coat hanger to jimmy the lock open.

What the hey, though. Camping out under the stars in my van sure beats staying in some fancy Hilton hotel with a pool, gym, hot tub, great restaurant, beautiful waitresses, live music, satellite TV, free movies, king-size bed and room service. I do stay in a Hilton now and then, however, just to raid the closet and stock up on some coat hangers. □

It's the perfect place to get a good night's sleep. It's roomy enough to stretch out, it's quiet, dark, earthquake-proof, waterproof, bug proof, varmint proof and wind resistant. Pets, ringing telephones and door-to-door salesmen are nowhere to be found. Plus, it's mobile! It's my Ford Aerostar All-Wheel Drive minivan!

I call it a Lemonstar because the drivetrain and brakes have caused me nothing but misery (and lightened my wallet). But, when I want to stay overnight at a riding area, my lemon-of-a-car does make a darn good hotel. When I'm traveling to a ride area, my ATV is safe inside the van (and fills the interior with 100% of the adult daily requirement of toxic gasoline fumes).

Before I bought my first van, an '88 Dodge Caravan, I borrowed my buddy Ed's V8 Chevy van. Big Ed wasn't too attentive to automotive maintenance. When I'd pick up his van for the weekend, the radiator would be bone dry and four quarts of oil would be needed to bring the level up to the bottom of the dipstick. Big Ed was smart, and knew that loaning the van was a free ticket to badly needed routine maintenance.

The last time I used Ed's van, the wind howled at our campsite in the Dumont dunes. Sand found its way into every orifice of the human body, as well as under the hood of the van. On the way home, the engine ran awful. I unscrewed the air filter cover to see if sand was clogging the filter, and found no blockage whatsoever. In fact, I found no air filter whatsoever.