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THE LATEST AND GREATEST RECREATIONAL VEHICLES

Crew Chief Aero-Condo

By Bill Farlow

I WASN'T LOOKING FOR A NEW TRUCK. OUR KODIAK, BIG RED, WAS doing a good job and didn't cost a bundle. I figured it would be the last truck we'd buy. But along came Crew Chief, and things changed.

As fate would have it, my vendor's table at the Gillette, Wyoming, Great North American RV Rally last summer was just around the corner from Crew Chief's space. Of course, I had to make my inspection of all the new equipment on exhibit. Nothing wrong with that—take a look, check the numbers, make a few notes and move on. But at the Crew Chief space, I lingered a little too long.

Crew Chief calls their truck the Aero-Condo, the "ultimate hauler." They start with a Freightliner chassis and build a huge space behind the front seats—the "condo."

It's tall, too—6 feet, 11 inches of headroom. Got any NBA friends? They can stand up back there.

While the height impressed me, the amenities got even more attention. There's a microwave oven, an enclosed

toilet, a fold-down bed, a small sink, a TV, a generator and a small refrigerator. It looks like a compact motorhome, something you could use for an overnight stay away from your trailer. It turns out, the Aero-Condo can be registered as a motorhome. It's great when you've gone sightseeing, found something you didn't expect and

want to spend the night. Everything you need is there. It's a small motorhome with big muscles for towing the largest fifth wheel. I don't have to tell you the advantages of that.

Still, we had a perfectly good tow truck, and the big Crew Chief was a bit longer than we preferred. I mentioned all that to the salesman and started back to the safety of our table. "That's our 96-inch condo," he said. "We also build a 70-inch model."

Then Louise went to look it over, and that was that. All I could do was talk about the technical side of things.

It had to have a 300-horse Cat, a six-speed Allison, an exhaust brake, air suspension on the cab and rear axle, a Kubota diesel generator, a McCall air-suspension fifth wheel and the 70-inch condo. Almost all of that's standard, but I had to act like I

had some control of how this truck was going together.

I did have one special requirement. Since we were going to build this truck on a 170-inch wheelbase and stuff a generator in one of the storage boxes, there was a definite shortage of storage space. Other RVers probably wouldn't have this problem, but my tools are a



PROFESSOR FARLOW AND HIS WIFE, LOUISE, AND THEIR NEW CREW CHIEF CONDO ON WHEELS.

necessity. I took out the old tape measure and found that, if we moved the kingpin behind the rear axle (this'll work with these larger trucks but don't try it with a pickup), there's room for a dream-size vertical storage cabinet behind the condo. It's the same width as the condo, the same outside height and 20 inches deep with heavy adjustable shelves and two large access doors. Looks good and gives all the space a "wrench" like me could want.

But there was still the matter of price. Surely, this would cost more than a mere writer could afford. *Surprise.* Crew Chief trucks are built in Canada. Sam the salesman explained that this gives them a cost-to-build advantage that they pass on to the buyer. Also, Crew Chief doesn't have a dealer system to tack on their percentage. They do have an arrangement with several RV dealers to handle warranty work with the conversion. Local Freightliner dealers handle chassis

Crew Chief Sales
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For a closer look, visit the Crew Chief exhibit at the Great North American RV Rally this month in Perry, Georgia.

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warranty work, of course. There went my last objection. Order the bottle of champagne to celebrate.

So, how does it work? Well, we just drove it down from the pick-up point in Atlanta, and I can report that performance is great. Having driven several other tow trucks costing more money, I was prepared to keep my personal shock-absorbing system at full alert. Again, *surprise*. The ride isn't just good, it's excellent. There's a stretch of I-65 south of Montgomery that needs

repair. The bumps are very noticeable in Louise's Mercury Tracer. It was her turn with the truck and mine with the car when we hit that stretch. When I asked her later about the bumps, she hadn't even been aware they were there. I'm looking forward to I-10 in Louisiana and east of El Paso.

Another thing about Crew Chief is the noise level inside. Quiet is the word. There was one stretch with the wind at the wrong angle, but even at 70 MPH the noise level made listening to the radio

or a CD a pleasure rather than a pain.

Fit and finish should satisfy even the pickiest customer. The long list of options makes it easy to finally say "That's enough. We'll take it." Want the biggest Caterpillar in the campground? You can have it with up to 430 horsepower. Transmission can be either the Allison World six-speed automatic or a Fuller semiautomatic 10-speed. And whichever Aero-Condo you get will be built on the appropriate Freightliner chassis. It's hard to do better than that.

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