

# Testing the ElDorado 35-foot motorhome

Kansas-built coach is flagship of Class A line

By DON WRIGHT

**A**s Class A motorhomes became larger and more luxurious during the last couple of years, prices of those units have skyrocketed along with the lengths. Thirty-five and 38-foot coaches costing well over \$100,000 are no longer unusual.

EIDorado Motor Corporation, like its competitors, has gradually increased the size and luxury of its coaches in order to meet consumer demand. But unlike some of the other companies, EIDorado has concentrated heavily upon holding down prices even while it improved the quality of its top-line motorhome—the 35-foot President.

Exactly how successful EIDorado has been in doing that became clear to me recently when I tested a 1985 President during a trip to Dallas, Texas. The eye-catching coach routinely drew praise from people in campgrounds, service stations and highway rest areas. I heard so many comments about our “expensive” motorhome that I finally started asking people

how much they thought the EIDorado cost. Their answers ranged from \$75,000 to \$125,000.

I was astonished—not so much that people over-valued the motorhome, but more because they assumed it was a high-line coach instead of the mid-price product that it truly was.

The President carried a base retail price of only \$48,469 and, at that figure, was an excellent value. My test unit had a great deal of optional equipment—ordered by Camper Capitol U.S.A., a Dallas RV dealership that sells EIDorado motorhomes. Those options boosted the price to \$63,666.

Admittedly, that cost is at the high end of the mid-price range, but consider some of the options: six-way power driver and passenger seats (\$526 each), leather-wrapped steering wheel (\$313), driver's door (\$646), front driving lamps (\$272), Michelin radial tires (\$838), Dometic Automatic Energy Selection refrigerator (\$434), microwave oven (\$538), electronic-ignition



water heater (\$295), 6.5-kw Onan generator (\$3,732), central vacuum cleaner (\$379), aluminum wheels (\$1,264) and two 13,500 Dometic three-speed rotary air conditioners (\$1,408).

Furthermore, there is no guesswork about price when shopping for an EIDorado. The base price and a full list of options, with their prices, are included on a window sticker that is shipped with each unit. EIDorado is one of the few RV manufacturers providing customers with suggested retail prices rather than allowing dealers to set their own markups.

For its cost, the EIDorado President is an excellent value—a far better value, in my opinion, than early, lower priced versions of the same coach.

I camped in a President for a full week while evaluating it, and I was able to find only a few minor things to criticize. On the other hand, I was quite impressed with the overall workmanship, the improved instrument panel, the higher quality furnishings and a series of special features that I didn't expect to find in the EIDorado. →



Largest EIDorado motorhome is built on a Chevrolet chassis with an extended 208-inch wheelbase and a 454-cid engine.

I had tested earlier versions of the unit, so I was able to see definite improvements that added value to the coach. What truly interested me, however, was its road performance. Mechanical difficulties with models I tested two years ago prevented me from judging the roadability of the President, and I was anxious to put the motorhome through its paces on a variety of road surfaces.

That opportunity came immediately after I drove the coach away from Camper Capitol in Garland, Texas: I found myself immersed in rush-hour Dallas traffic on the I-635 bypass. I had always thought Midwestern drivers were crazy, but those Texans—probably hurrying home to fire up their barbecue grills—would have shamed an Indy 500 racecar driver.

To make matters worse, the Dallas area was hit by a windstorm that somebody said had blown in from the desert.

The sensible thing would have been to park the motorhome and walk. But I plunged through the windstorm and threaded my way into the traffic, and I discovered to my amazement that the Eldorado was virtually unaffected by the heavy crosswinds. Not only that, but its size, and probably its ominous wedge-shape nose, intimidated other drivers so much

that they simply moved out of my way.

Eldorado claims its Class A has one of the most aerodynamic shapes in the motorhome field, thanks to its dramatically rearward-sloped front end and pointed nose. My driving experience with the President convinced me that the coach's shape does contribute to its good handling.

Driven off the expressway and into the Texas boondocks near Lake Whitney, the motorhome proved to be a good-combering, road-hugging unit that performed as well on two-lane country roads and gravel lanes as it did on expressways.

I have to temper my praise of the coach's roadability with one observation, however: Its 11-foot rear overhang had a tendency to drag in low places—especially at service station curb cuts—and that overhang should be considered by anyone who intends to drive the coach into desolate offroad areas. I urged Eldorado executives to install drag bars on its units to prevent damage to the rear bumper and underside of the coach.

Use of a tag axle also would eliminate the dragging problem, but a tag would add significantly to the cost of the coach. I was informed that Eldorado's plans for the 1986 model year include offer-



ing another model with a tag.

I also asked the company if it could reposition the President's two fuel tanks so that gasoline-fill positions are not situated on opposite sides of the coach. A company spokesman said a single 60-gallon fuel tank already is being phased in to replace the two smaller tanks.

The 1985 President featured an improved instrument panel in which driving function controls and gauges were grouped in one area, radio and heater switches were in another section, and the generator switch, hourmeter and systems monitor were in a third.

I liked the use of rocker switches for wipers, washer, courtesy lights, battery boost, running lights and fuel tanks. Back-lighted instruments made everything easy to see at night. Access to the cab was easy and direct since there was no engine cover console to clutter up the front end and serve as an obstacle. Built-in drink holders provided on each sidewall made a console unnecessary.

From a driver's point of view, the President is a very comfortable, good-handling and easy-to-drive motorhome. Fuel economy, at 7.6 mpg, is all anyone could hope to achieve with a 12,000-pound unit, and 0-60 mph acceleration in 29 seconds is quite good for so large a motorhome. **RyL**



35-foot President featured velour upholstery in spice color on couch, dinette seats, cocktail chairs, cab seats and even the bed.

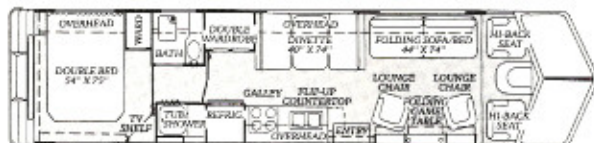
# Eldorado's 'attention to detail'

RV product brochures nearly always laud a manufacturer's "attention to detail" without really saying what that means. But in the case of the Eldorado President, "attention to detail" is an apt description of how the coach is designed and furnished.

Here are some examples of the President's detail-work:

**FURNITURE**—A living area cocktail table stores behind a hardwood-framed cabinet door on the curbside wall. It lifts out quite easily and is self-suspending without floor supports. On one side of the table, a small hinged countertop lifts to reveal a magazine rack (or a place for carrying record albums). Another hinged top reveals space for three wine bottles.

**STORAGE SPACE**—Full, open storage with direct access is provided under one of the dinette benches. The kitchen has an excellent two-level storage section under the sink, with both levels



carpeted. A double closet has a carpeted floor and shelf and, under the shelf are two clothes drawers designed so they will not fall out when the motorhome makes sharp turns! One section of the split bathroom is equipped with a large, compartmentalized medicine cabinet. Direct-access storage is provided under the rear double bed. The bedroom also features a shirt closet, overhead cabinets all around, a corner TV stand with three storage sections and two nightstands flanking the bed. Excellent exterior storage compartments are molded into the fiberglass body of the motorhome.

**LIGHTING**—Besides pancake lights placed at suitable locations on the ceiling, the President boasts of a fluorescent light built into the underside of the cabinet above the

sink; tubular directional lights on the ceiling at the entrance and just forward of the dinette, and directional lights with dimmers on the underside of the living room cabinets.

**WORKMANSHIP**—The kitchen is equipped with a beautiful oak parquet floor, with a carpet remnant furnished to protect the wood from scuffing. Cabinets have picture-frame doors with wicker-type inserts. A hardwood cutting board serves double duty as a sink cover, and a hinged kitchen countertop extension is provided just inside the entry door. A toehold insert at the base of the kitchen cabinets is an excellent feature. There are no rough or unfinished workmanship anywhere in the coach. **RyL**

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