

Luxury to Go

story by Jeannie Armstrong, photography by DHS Communications.



Pleasure-Way Industries conquers new export markets.

Saskatchewan ingenuity knows no boundaries. The proof of that statement is evident at Pleasure-Way Industries, Saskatoon manufacturer of van motorhomes. The family-owned company has not only captured an extensive share of U.S. markets, it has now extended its reach into Great Britain and Japan.

Approximately 70 per cent of the "Class B" or van motorhomes manufactured by Pleasure-Way Industries are sold through a 50-dealer network in the

United States. Pleasure-Way's market share in the U.S. now totals approximately one-third of all sales in this category of recreational vehicles.

Eight years ago, Pleasure-Way's mini-palaces on wheels broke into the lucrative Japanese market. "We were approached by dealers from Japan about our product at a manufacturers' trade show in Louisville, Kentucky. It's the largest trade show in the industry, and dealers from around the world attend every year," says Dean Rumpel, vice-president of Pleasure-Way Industries.

This spring, the corporation made its first entry into European markets, exporting units to a dealership in Great Britain.

Company founder and president Merv Rumpel built his first van motorhome in 1986, as a sideline to his local RV sales dealership, Glenwood Trailer Sales, which is now under the direction of son and vice-president, Terry Rumpel.

"Glenwood Trailer Sales was approached by a company that is now our competitor. They wanted us to become a dealer for their van motorhomes. My father decided to take the product on to sell, but when he contacted them, he found they were so backlogged with orders, it would take six months before we could receive any inventory. He figured that in six months, he could build one himself. He worked on it after hours, in the back of the shop, and came up with his own prototype of a van motorhome. With

his extensive contacts in the RV industry, my dad was able to sell the motorhomes as quickly as he could build them," Dean Rumpel says.

"In our first year, we built 16 units and had six employees. Today, Pleasure-Way Industries employs 150 employees and manufactures approximately 750 units annually."

The luxurious van motorhomes are built on three different van platforms, by Ford, General Motors and Dodge. "The Ford and GM platforms are 20 feet long. The new Dodge Sprinter platform is 22 feet long," says Rumpel.

Consumers can select from three different floor plans. "Each of the three floor plans is available on any of the three van chassis," says Rumpel. All are furnished with all the comforts and conveniences of home, including an amply-equipped kitchen with a domestic refrigerator, two-burner stove, microwave oven, sink and Shur-Flo demand water system and large pantry; a fully self-contained private bathroom including a vanity, flush toilet and a sit-down shower; and comfortable sleeping quarters with an electric sofa that converts into a choice of two single beds, a king-size bed or an extra-long double bed.

The luxuries don't stop there. "Today, all of our units feature LCD flat screen TVs and home theatre packages. What once were considered options are now standard features in Pleasure-Way van motorhomes," Rumpel says.

Because each van motorhome includes amenities for sleeping and cooking as well as a bathroom, the units qualify in the U.S. for income tax deductions as a second residence.

What distinguishes Pleasure-Way van motorhomes from the competition is the flawless craftsmanship and intricate finishing inside each unit. "The differences are really apparent in the details," Rumpel says. "The assembly and finishing of our cabinetry, for example, is superb. It visually separates us from the competition.



"Our floor plans are considered quite innovative. We have a lot of useable space. We also offer some unique design features that our competitors do not, such as our self-contained private bathrooms."

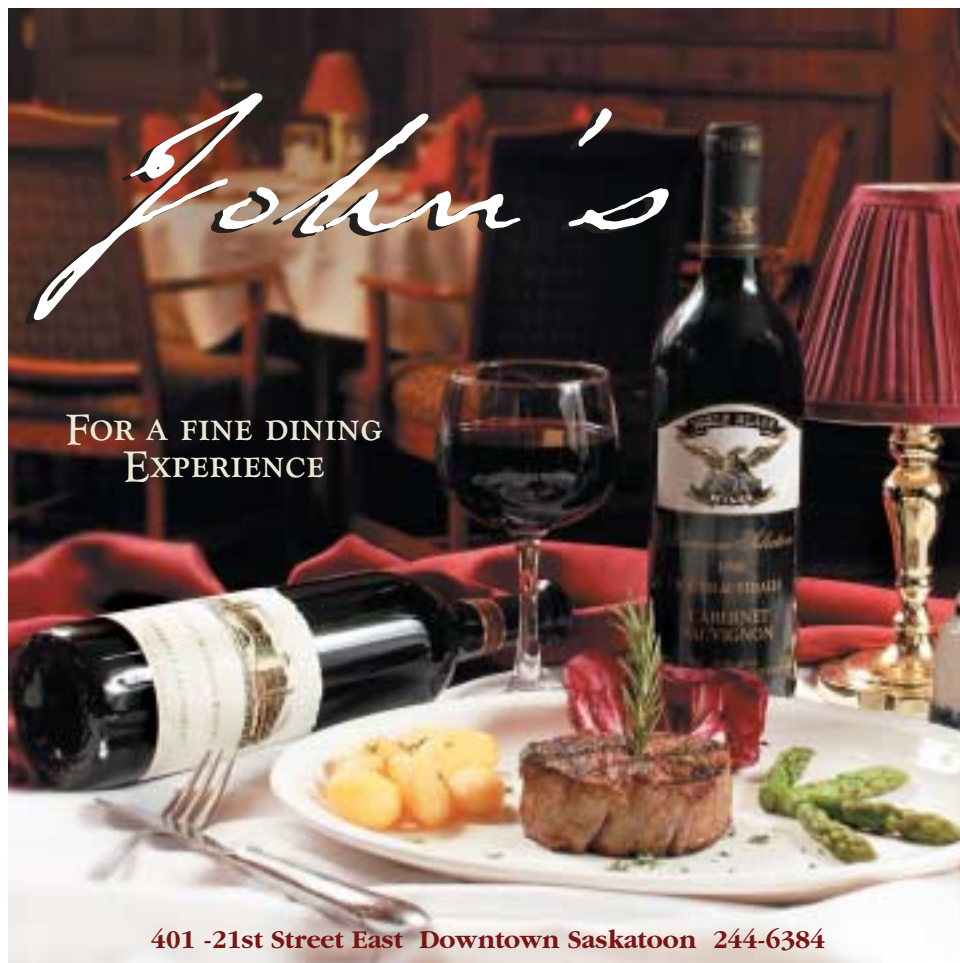
The quality construction, together with an extensive warranty program, has created a solid reputation and strong customer loyalty. "We just had one gentleman who ordered his fifth unit," says Rumpel. One of the perks for new buyers is automatic membership in the North American-wide Pleasure-Way Travel Club. The club actively promotes the RV lifestyle, providing information in free quarterly newsletters, as well as extending invitations to attend rallies and other RV adventures.

Rumpel notes that all of Pleasure-Way's competitors are based in Canada.

"We're all reaching over the border and selling into the U.S. market. Over the years though, the number of competitors is decreasing. It's becoming more of a niche market, because of the time it takes to build a van motorhome. We definitely can build our units more affordably in Canada than in the U.S., with its more expensive labour market."

It takes six weeks to build each van motorhome, so many of the units are pre-sold as they come off the assembly line. "However, for peak selling periods, we try to build up our level of yard inventory."

In North America, Pleasure-Way Industries' target market consists of consumers age 65-plus. Many have



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previously owned larger recreational vehicles and are now downsizing. They're not yet ready to give up the RV lifestyle, but are looking for a vehicle that is easier and more convenient to operate.

The Japanese represent a very different customer, however. "The demographics in Japan aren't the same as the North American market. It's more of a family market. So we build a slightly different floor plan for the Japanese market. Those units have more seats, because the customers are younger, with children," says Rumpel.



While Pleasure-Way's export activity is expanding, Rumpel stresses that the North American market is the primary focus. "We've got about all we can handle, just with the North American market."

Manufacturing activities are now spread out over five buildings and 80,000 square feet. A fifth building, measuring 20,000 square feet, was constructed last year.

The Rumpels are quick to attribute their success to their hard-working employees, including 15 who have been with Pleasure-Way since day one. "Our employees make everything work so well. Good employees are at the core of every successful business. We've got a great bunch here. They take a lot of pride in what they do, and that is really reflected in the end results. That's what keeps everybody going."

The leadership of Merv Rumpel has also been a guiding light over the years, according to his sons. "My dad exemplifies leadership. The way he conducts himself – his values, fairness and old-fashioned work ethic – translates to everyone in this company. That's why we are where we are today," Rumpel says. 🐾



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