

Longtime readers of *Trailer Life* may remember an article in the August 1976 issue called "What's Over the Next Hill?" It described a 1975 Jeep J-20 four-wheel-drive (4WD) pickup with an 8-foot utility body and Alaskan pop-up camper that my wife Aletha and I used for our life of full-time travel.

I retired in 1975, and Aletha and I spent the next 15 years exploring backroads of the United States and Mexico in that Jeep-Alaskan, covering thousands of miles on rugged, remote trails and indeed discovering what was over many hills.

We traveled slowly, without a time-

table, following backroads wherever we could. For example, if we were going to Montana, I would plot our course northward on as many unpaved trails as possible, going into towns only when it was time to replenish supplies. Our style of travel didn't put many miles on the camper. Sometimes a road would be so chal-

lenging that 15 or 20 miles would be a full day's travel.

We were always curious about what a trail offered. What was its purpose? Was it passable? Would it provide a nice campsite? We would often camp off an abandoned logging road or along a tranquil desert trail. We would make day hikes into the surrounding country, returning to the comfort of our camper at night.

During those 15 years, I expected to see breakthroughs in truck design and camper comfort, but nothing appeared that was significantly better than our 1975 Jeep-Alaskan combination; nothing, that is, until I discov-

photos by author



Quest for

*After 15 years of backcountry travel
in a conventional rig, these explorers
are driving a unique, new RV*

by MARVIN PATCHEN



ered the remarkable Mitsubishi Fuso this past year.

The Japanese-built Fuso is a 3-ton, forward-control truck with a tilt cab, a 12-foot bed, a turbocharged and inter-cooled diesel engine, and 4WD. The chassis' short 108.9-inch wheelbase allows a tight, 21-foot turning circle.

The Mitsubishi's configuration is far more efficient than that of a standard pickup or van. For example, the Fuso is 18 feet in overall length, actually 6 inches shorter than our Jeep J-20. Yet the truck provides more room for carrying equipment and supplies. We would be able to travel in the back-country for weeks at a time.

The Fuso also has a huge edge in weight-carrying ability. Even though I had upgraded the Jeep pickup to a 1-ton capacity, when it was fully loaded it was right at its gross vehicle weight rating (gvwr). But when the 3-ton Fuso was loaded with the same supplies we used to carry in the J-20, it was still 3000 pounds under its gvwr!

I've owned two other Mitsubishis, a sports car and a Montero 4WD, both with troublefree maintenance records, so I felt confident the Fuso would be dependable—obviously an important consideration when traveling on remote trails. The fuel econ-

omy and reliability of a diesel engine were additional factors in the big truck's favor, and I was encouraged that the Fuso owner's manual covered routine service up to 180,000 miles.

For offroad driving, the Fuso's raised, forward-control seating position provides excellent visibility, while the high approach and departure angles minimize the chance of hanging up the bumpers. Another plus is the tilt cab, which allows easy access to the engine compartment and front-end components.

There are no ready-made camper bodies for the Fuso, so we had one built to our design by Callen Camper

Adventure





The Fuso's cab tilts forward for access to the four-cylinder diesel engine. The double doors toward the front of the camper body open to a storage area holding up to 40 cubic feet

Company of El Cajon, California, a firm specializing in custom campers and trailers with all-steel "lifetime guaranteed" frames.

The body is simply a big box. Inside, it's laid out like a pickup camper, with the bunk located high and forward in the cabover section. There's a huge storage area under the bed, which, together with other outside compartments, provides 40 cubic feet of cargo space. That gives us plenty of room for extra water, fuel or whatever we need for a particular trip.

One problem with the cabover-type bunk was what to do with the dinette table when we were climbing into bed. The solution was to design the table so it could slide into a compartment underneath the bunk, completely out of the way.

The equipment with which our camper is outfitted might seem routine to most RV owners, but, for a 4WD vehicle built for travel into wild country, the rig is pure luxury. Our equipment includes a 6-cubic-foot refrigerator, a sink, a 12-volt DC water pump (and standby hand pump), a stove and oven, a flush toilet, excellent interior lighting and a 43-watt solar panel to help maintain the batteries.

Because of the camper's limited floor space, we don't have an inside shower. We use a 2-gallon, pump-up garden shower outdoors. Privacy isn't a concern, because we usually camp in remote areas. Also, the sprayer is great for washing our camper.

Mitsubishi builds a longer version of the Fuso—with a 132.7-inch wheelbase and a 14-foot truck bed—that would provide for a bigger camper body with an inside shower, yet still be shorter overall than most full-size pickups with campers.

The Fuso is not a high-speed vehi-

cle, though it will cruise at a steady and respectable 60 mph. With the turbocharger, it will climb grades at an elevation of 9000 feet as easily as it does at sea level. At its maximum gvwr, it's rated to climb 70 percent grades, and that's steep!

The manual transmission has five speeds and the transfer case two ranges, for a total of 10 forward speeds. That provides a gear for just about any situation, offroad or on. The truck's standard drum brakes are supplemented with a Jacobs exhaust brake, a device usually found only on big trucks and motorhomes.

Unlike most 4WD rigs, our Fuso actually gets better fuel mileage off the highway than it does on. However, poorer on-road mileage is largely due to the big, boxy camper body, which has high aerodynamic drag. The vehicle averages 16.5 mpg offroad and 14.5 mpg on the highway with the air-conditioner operating.

For a shakedown cruise with the Fuso after the camper body was installed, Aletha and I chose southern Utah. It's an area where numerous unmarked 4WD trails offer incredible scenic beauty, as well as the driving challenge of washouts, rocks and sand. We were by ourselves, so I was careful driving in sand, learning gradually about the Fuso's capabilities. I soon found that the 4WD traction and dual rear wheels could handle just about any condition except steep sand dunes, and that the 21-foot turning circle was ideal on narrow, dead-end trails.

During three weeks in the Utah backcountry, we didn't really need 4WD on a lot of trails, but we did not know that until we tried them. It was reassuring to have 4WD when we needed it.

MITSUBISHI FUSO/ CALLEN CAMPER

Performance

Mileage	
Off highway	16.5 mpg
On highway	14.5 mpg

Engine and Chassis

Engine	3.3-liter, 4-cylinder diesel
Horsepower	127
Torque	207
Fuel delivery	Direct injection, turbocharged
Transmission	5-speed manual w/2-speed transfer case
Tire size	7.50R16
Brakes	Front and rear drum w/exhaust brake
Suspension	Leaf spring
Fuel capacity	33 gal
Gvwr*	11,600 lbs
Curb weight	5,170 lbs
Wet weight, fully loaded	8,600 lbs

*Gross vehicle weight rating

Dimensions

Overall length	18'
Wheelbase	108.9"
Front track	65.6"
Rear track	58.9"

Camper Body

Ext width	7'1"
Ext height	9'2"
Int height	5'10"
Frame	Steel/aluminum
Insulation	Fiberglass
Freshwater cap	35 gal
w/portable tanks	55 gal
Black-water cap	30 gal
Gray-water cap	5 gal
Propane cap	7 gal
Refrigerator	Dometic 6 cu ft
Toilet	Freshwater
Converter	20 amp
Exterior storage cap	40 cu ft

Pricing

Chassis and cab	\$18,841
Camper body	\$15,000-\$20,000

We have covered thousands of off-road miles in the western United States, as well as most of the trails in Mexico's Baja California peninsula. But we still have a lifetime of backroads and trails to discover. Our new Mitsubishi Fuso turbodiesel truck with its Callen camper is designed to meet the challenges of backcountry driving as we continue to find what's over the next hill. TL

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