

AMERICA'S NO. 1 TRAILER, CAMPER, MOTORHOME MAGAZINE

# Trailer Life

\$1.00  
MARCH 1976  
ICD 08845

## Two TL Exclusives:

- The New Kenskill — First Audit Anywhere!
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## Spring Boat

### Buyer's Guide

22 Inflatables, Dinghies,  
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## Don't Fiddle With Your Refrigerator!

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- Buddy Up For Security

TL Test Reports:  
FMC 29-Footer  
Sunline 20½' Orbiter



## Trip-Testing

# FMC 2900R

A unique chassis makes this coach one of the best-handling vehicles, for its size, ever built.

by BILL ESTES

THE OPERA CROWD was arriving at War Memorial Auditorium in San Francisco one Friday evening, and up rolls an FMC — not a motorhome but a transit bus. It seemed the most stylish arrival of the evening, even though more than a few limousines were present.

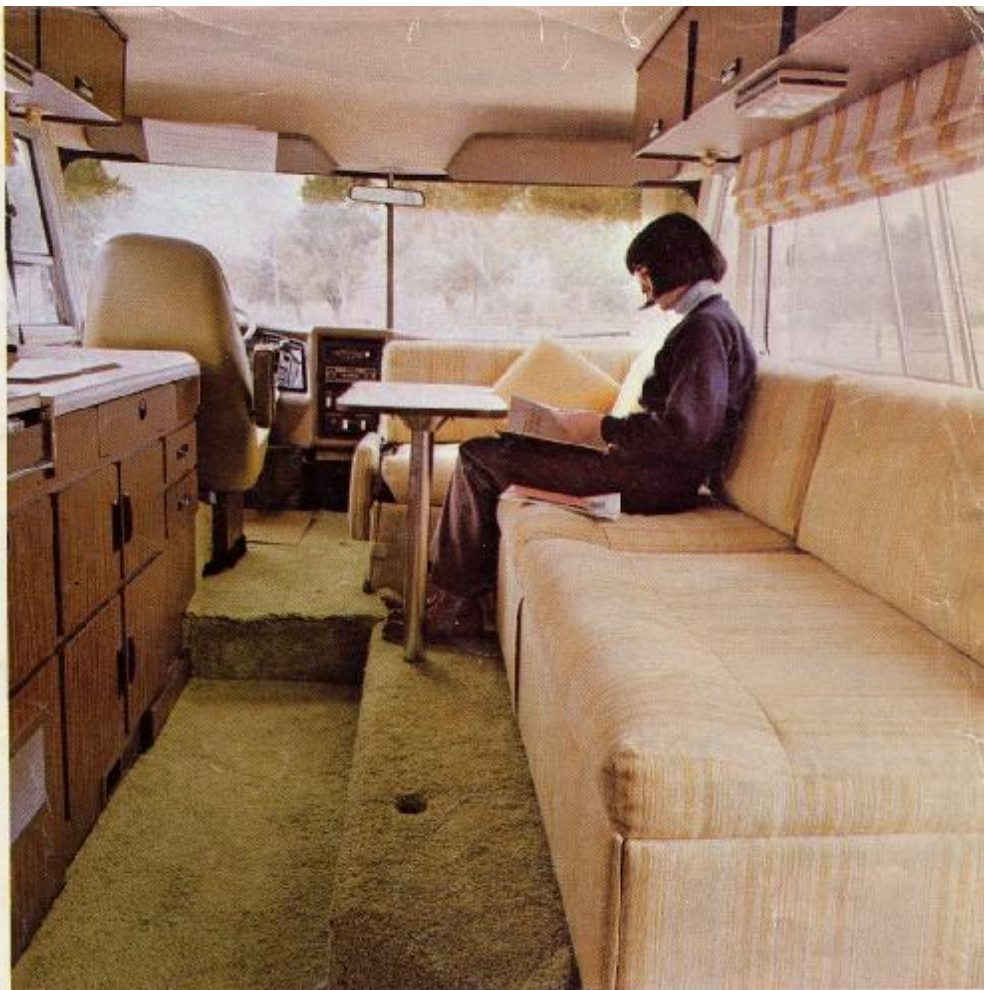
I knew that FMC was using the 29-foot chassis as a transit bus, but still it was a surprise for it unexpectedly to appear, since I had become accustomed to thinking of it as a recreational vehicle.

Whether in its guise as a transit bus or outfitted as a motorhome, the FMC is right in its element, which should say volumes about the exterior design and its visual impact. The coach exudes quality. Many other big motorhomes say *expensive* but few say *class* so effectively.

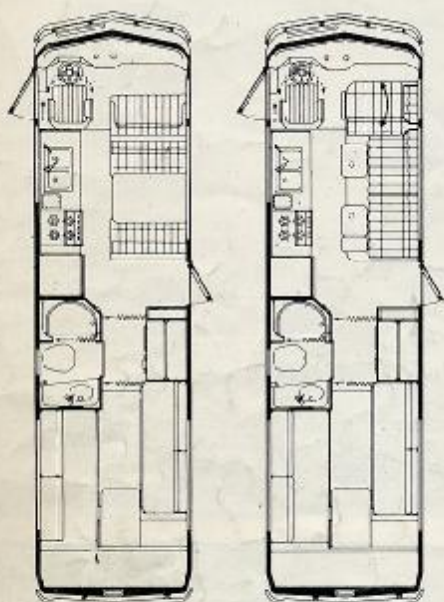
RV travel might well include an opera if one is so inclined. Nothing wrong with relaxing for a few days in a wooded camp outside the city and making a trek in for the performance, although I suspect it might be difficult to find a parking place in San Francisco for something which is 30 feet 2 inches long (including the spare tire). The FMC is ideal for high-style entertaining in which the visual impact of the coach — both exterior and interior — is a distinct factor in its suitability. All this is as it should be, because a coach priced at \$54,500 should be quite out of the ordinary.

A comparison with other luxury coaches in the 30-foot class must be rather thorough because there is much more to

*The J floorplan for the 2900R features an L-shaped sofa, the forward portion of which converts to either forward-facing or rear-facing seat. Dining tables are stored in cedar-lined closet when not in use. Coach has central air conditioning rather than roof-mounted*



the FMC than immediately meets the eye. There may be better floorplans, although what is good, better and best depends on one's personal point of view. And there are interior designs with more pizzazz, although few, if any, are more tasteful. Where the differences show up are in chassis design, in the quality of materials and in the workmanship, which is flawless ... or was in the test coach. A plant tour should be on every prospective FMC buyer's agenda because it's quite an education in what motorhome design and assembly can be.



**A Model**  
Convertible Dinette

**J Model**  
Sofa-lounge with  
twin tuckaway tables

The chassis is engineered from the ground up with a motor coach in mind, rather than following a design originated for commercial trucks. The commercial truck chassis get the job done but the FMC exemplifies the handling, stability and steering precision of which a large motorhome is capable when the chassis is designed specifically for that purpose. It's very low and is rather complex. It's a very strong perimeter design which encompasses the holding tanks and water tank in the lowest possible position for the least effect on the vehicle center of gravity. The front and rear suspensions are integrated in the chassis design rather than simply hanging on beneath frame rails. It is tremendously impressive to see how it all goes together — and the attention to detail which it gets. One begins to think that the coach should last forever and that it could be entered in a grand prix race if it weren't so big.

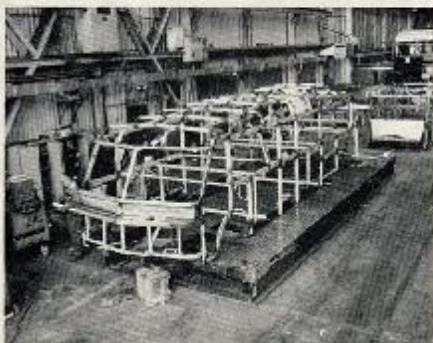
FMC drivability, although not quite up to grand prix standards, probably is unique in the motorhome industry. The suspension is so well-controlled that it takes almost any-



Driver's door is an FMC convenience-safety feature.



Bathroom has 3-way mirrors and two large medicine chests.



FMC superstructure is welded aluminum. Chassis is steel.

## PERFORMANCE FMC 2900R

Mileage*	8 mpg
Engine Coolant Temp	
Level.....	185
Uphill.....	210
Trans Oil Temp	
Level.....	190
Uphill.....	250
Engine Oil Temp	
Level.....	240
Uphill.....	270
Acceleration	
0-60 mph.....	22 sec.
40-60 mph.....	13 sec.

\*Flat highway mileage recorded at 55 mph, 800 feet elevation, 60 degrees ambient temp. Operating temperatures recorded at 60-65 degrees ambient. Uphill test in second gear, 45 mph on 8-mile 6% grade.

## SPECIFICATIONS

### COACH

Ext. Length.....	30' 2" (inc. spare tire)
Ext. Width.....	95"
Ext. Height.....	110"
Int. Height.....	77"
Frame Constr.....	Aluminum upper cage, fiberglass ext.
Insulation.....	Urethane
Water Cap.....	60 gal.
Sink/Shower Holding.....	28 gal.
Waste Holding.....	37 gal.
Propane Cap.....	20 gal.
Water Syst. Type.....	Demand
Furnace.....	30,000-Btu
Refrigerator.....	8-cu.-ft. AC-DC
Toilet.....	Fresh water
Electrical.....	45A converter, 6.5KW generator, 220AH aux. batt., 22,000-Btu central AC, 28,000-Btu front & rear automotive AC.

### CHASSIS

Model.....	2900R
Engine.....	440 V-8, 235 hp @ 4000 rpm, 340 lb.-ft. @ 2900 rpm, 8.2 to 1 comp. ratio, 4-bar. carburetor
Transmission.....	3-speed auto.
Axle Ratio.....	4.62 to 1
Tire Size.....	7.50-17 8PR radial, max. 5510 lbs. front axle (2 tires), 10,480 lbs. rear axle (4 tires), @ 70 psi
Wheelbase.....	185"
Brakes.....	Drum
Suspension.....	Transverse leaf spring front, torsion bar rear; all independent
Cooling System.....	HD
Trans Oil Cooling.....	Integral in radiator
Fuel Capacity.....	60 gal.

### WET WEIGHT

(Water, gasoline, propane tanks full but no supplies or passengers)

Front Axle.....	4570
Rear Axle.....	9570
Left Side.....	7130
Right Side.....	7010
Total.....	14,140

### Chassis Ratings

Front GAWR*	5500 lbs.
Rear GAWR*	10,400 lbs.
GVWR**	15,900 lbs.

Owner may add up to 1760 lbs. in weight of passengers and supplies to motorhome equipped as test unit without violating mfr. maximum load rating.

\*GAWR: gross axle weight rating.

\*\*GVWR: gross vehicle weight rating.



two adults occupy the coach.

The rear bedroom doubles as a lounge, with large side windows although we didn't find any seat belts back there. We found belts for the driver and two passengers. Belts should be provided for at least three passengers and preferably some belts in the rear because the ride back there is quite good. Engine fan noise is more obvious there, though.

The rear twin beds are 35 x 80 and 38 x 80 inches and the front sofa forms a 31 x 78-inch bed. Recently added are overhead bunks suitable for children so the coach will sleep three adults and two children. FMC lists it as a 6-sleeper but we couldn't find the accommodation for the sixth person, unless four of the six are children.

A drop-leaf table between the two beds is convenient.

Inside storage is quite good throughout the coach, with practically every nook and cranny converted to a cabinet or drawer, with excellent workmanship, positive spring-loaded closures and roller-action drawers. Outside storage consists of what used to be a very large trunk on the right



Rear-engine compartment houses 440 industrial V-8 plus 6.5 KW generator on left. View here is from the right.

side ahead of the door. Now it's not quite as large, being about one-third occupied by a water tank which previously was in front under the floor. Still it's spacious enough to carry normal equipment, including leveling blocks.

MC does not include a power leveling system and it's out of character that the owner of a \$54,500 coach should have to drag out the leveling blocks or boards when he stops for the night in a spot that's not reasonably level. The refrigerator, being a compressor-type AC DC unit (Norcold) doesn't require level attitude but few of us like to sleep in an unlevel coach.

Speaking of appliances, the refrigerator is part of a long list of equipment that is very consistent in quality and it includes a 6.5KW Onan generator, a 22,000-Btu central air-conditioning system and a Lear AM-FM tape system with excellent sound quality. The central air system is quite effective but velocity through the two air outlets seemed a little high, which led us to think a third outlet might be wise and would cut down on noise.

Coach systems are operated from two 6-volt auxiliary batteries, wired in series for

12-volt output, while the coach is parked without an outside electrical hookup. The combined amp-hour rating for the two batteries is 220. (They're under the floor below the driver's feet.) They're charged either by a Triad-Utrad converter about 3 feet away (under the forward passenger seat) with rapid recharge capability or by the engine alternator through a heavy charge line (6-gauge).

As you would expect, plumbing and wiring are meticulously arranged and anchored. The holding tanks (37-gallon waste and 28-gallon sink/lav) are well protected in the chassis. The galley sinks drain into the waste holding tank rather than into the sink/shower tank, which would tend to limit self-containment in situations where the coach is parked for lengthy periods without hookups and the owner elects to drain the sink/shower tank into a bucket when necessary, in order to delay a trip to the nearest dumping station. But few FMC owners probably stay in one place that long without hookups. At least, FMC reports no complaints on the plumbing arrangement.

We found moderate error in readings with the water and holding tank gauges. The systems panel also includes a voltmeter for the auxiliary battery, an LP-gas gauge for the 20-gallon LP-gas tank and a remote starter for the AC generator. Another remote starter is built into the instrument panel.

The motorhome is equipped with an RCA television antenna and with a base and lead-in for a CB radio antenna.

The rear-engine design of the FMC is one of the more unusual features, not that rear-engine configurations are anything new. They're common in buses but not in motorhomes. The "pusher" configuration seems to work well. Fan noise is rather high, from the outside, because the radiator receives no ram air as is the case with a forward-facing radiator. The radiator is a huge 33½-quart unit and includes a large integral cooler for transmission oil.

Of course, a rear engine will pick up a lot of dirt on dusty roads. That's why FMC has gone to a diesel-tractor style air cleaner, replacing the conventional cleaner mounted on the carburetor, even though most FMC owners probably do not routinely travel dusty roads.

The engine, a Chrysler industrial 440, faces the rear and power from the transmission is transmitted to the large rear axle with 4.62 to 1 gear ratio through a short drive shaft. Universal joints in the individual axles permit the independent rear suspension. The axle is of the type used in FMC's armored personnel carriers. (The company is multinational and is into everything from food processing machinery to mining equipment. There are 31 divisions in the US plus operations in 18 foreign countries.)

Traction on slippery surfaces is exceptional, due to the high rear axle weight and

the narrow footprint of the Michelin 7.50-17 tires, which creates a high tread pressure per square inch on snow and ice and cuts through surface mud to a more firm footing below. However, the motorhome does have marginal power for climbing steep roads in high altitudes, where lower atmospheric pressures create horsepower losses.

Controls for the most part are excellent, despite the distance between the driver area and the engine, but we found one idiosyncrasy which bears mention. On an uphill grade leading to a mountain retreat, we stopped to open the gate. We shifted the transmission to "park" and activated the emergency brake. When we attempted to drive through the gate, the transmission wouldn't come out of the park position. The pressure on the holding mechanism in the transmission was too great for the long shift cable to overcome. So we slept that night on an incline that made us feel like we were falling out of bed.

Next morning, with wheels well blocked and with a helper standing firmly on the brake pedal while exerting pressure on the shift lever, I crawled under the rear of the coach and dislodged the trans from the park position with a couple of raps with a hammer on the proper linkage.

That problem was the only hint of a mechanical problem that we had and could have been avoided if we had actuated the emergency brake before shifting to the park position. FMC pays meticulous attention to quality control and even runs the coach 40 miles on a chassis dynamometer (rollers on which rear wheels run, with varying amounts of drag to simulate road conditions) while final adjustments are made. A 60-mile road test follows. The coach is exceptionally complex compared to most other motorhomes but it appears to be durable and not prone to an unusual number of problems. Engine access is good at the sides but from the top it's not so good.

Operating temperatures for the most part were good, although engine oil has a tendency to climb rather high during periods of second-gear, full-throttle running on hills. Fuel economy averaged 8 mpg under cruise conditions in low altitudes.

Maneuverability is exceptional for a coach with a 185-inch wheelbase, as indicated by the turning radius of 33 feet. We were able to get into and out of tighter places with this coach than with other conventional motorhomes of shorter length. The reason is that the front suspension design permits a very sharp steering angle for the front wheels.

In many ways the FMC 2900R is a one-of-a-kind motorhome. Although the floorplan won't suit everyone, it's well executed. On the road, the coach is second to none.

(Company address: FMC Corp., Motor Coach Div., PO Box 664-TL, Santa Clara, Calif. 95052.) TL



*The FMC 2900R combines an attractive, aerodynamically styled coach and an unusual chassis with independent suspension.*