

# CAR AND CARRIER

**P**ostal vehicles are part of daily life for an active letter carrier. A truck is just another tool, like a satchel or case, for doing our jobs. But postal vehicles are a familiar symbol of the trust and reliability of the Postal Service—almost as recognizable as letter carriers. For many, older postal vehicles are nostalgic reminders of the old days. And as they evolve, postal

vehicles take on new meaning for the young and the old, alike.

With the Postal Service looking to replace its aging fleet of vehicles, *The Postal Record* takes a look forward at the design process for the postal vehicle of the future and a look back at postal vehicles that letter carriers used in the past, including some that have found new lives.

## Back in time with previous generations' postal vehicles

**L**etter carriers have always enlisted the help of wheeled vehicles to bear the load of mail and packages. The vehicles they have used have changed dramatically with carriers' needs and the technology available. From the simple horse-drawn wagon of yesteryear to today's Long Life Vehicle (LLV) to tomorrow's Next Generation Postal Vehicle, the postal vehicle continues to change with the times. Here's a look at

some of the vehicles that city carriers have used throughout the history of the U.S. Postal Service.

When door-to-door mail delivery became a popular service in the United States during the Civil War, postal employees used horse-drawn carts to extend their range beyond the mail they could carry in a satchel or atop a horse.

One of the first photos of postal horse-drawn wagons shows regulation

wagons, which were used to transport mail between post offices and train stations in large cities from the 1870s to the first decade of the 20th century. The wagons were usually painted red, white and blue with gold lettering.

By the late 1890s, regulation wagons began to be phased out in favor of lighter and less-expensive screen wagons. Named for the built-in screen cages that protected the mail, screen

## USPS looks for the Next Generation Delivery Vehicle

**UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE**

**NEXT GENERATION DELIVERY VEHICLE**

- ENGINE COMPARTMENT
- DRIVER COMPARTMENT
- CARGO COMPARTMENT
- FRONT MAIL TRAY
- DRIVERS DOOR
- SIDE-CARGO DOOR
- REAR ROLL-UP DOOR
- STEP BUMPER

Width (max) ..... 85"  
 Length (max) ..... 230"  
 Payload ..... 2000 lbs.  
 Ground Clearance (min) ..... 7.3"  
 Interior Cargo Height (min) ..... 76"  
 Cargo side door width (min) ..... 30"  
 Floor height from ground (min,max) ..... 26", 28"  
 Distance between the Wheelwells (min) ..... 48"

\*All dimensions are in inches

**T**he Long Life Vehicle could finally be approaching the end of its life.

The Grumman LLV has been around for 30 years, longer than the original design's intended lifespan of 24 years. In addition to the LLV, the U.S. Postal Service currently operates a fleet that includes left-hand drive, multiple-sized and alternative fuel vehicles, along with commercially available vehicles such as cargo vans and mixed-delivery vehicles.

With the LLV at or beyond the end of its lifespan, USPS is continuing a years-long process of developing the next generation of delivery vehicles.

"Our goal is to obtain vehicles that will help us provide reliable and efficient delivery service for customers and honor our commitment to reducing the environmental impact of our fleet, while meeting the needs of our employees

Specifications released by the Postal Service

# Postal vehicle timeline



Regulation wagon, circa 1895



Electric automobile, 1901



Columbia automobile, 1906

wagons were used from the late 1880s until they were gradually replaced by motor vehicles.

In 1900, the production of automobiles in the United States was about equally divided among models powered by electric power, steam and gasoline. What was then known as the Post Office Department (POD) joined the automobile craze by employing all three kinds to move mail. Only later did gasoline engines come to dominate the market, in part because of Henry Ford's successful mass production of the Model T.

On Oct. 1, 1906, the POD began using its first gasoline-powered automobiles to collect mail from boxes in Baltimore through a contractor. The mail contractor supplied both the cars and

their drivers, with letter carriers riding along and collecting mail from the boxes. The Post Office Dept. concluded that one automobile could do twice the work of a horse-drawn cart, paving the way for further use of automobiles.

Some letter carriers began using motorcycles on their routes in the 1910s and 1920s—models such as “The Flying Merkel,” a belt-driven, two-cylinder V-twin motorcycle. But four-wheeled automobiles and trucks soon became the vehicles of choice due to their larger capacities.

With the larger, faster vehicles in service, the POD initiated Parcel Post service on Jan. 1, 1913. It was an instant success, with 300 million parcels mailed in the first six months alone. That year, Sears, Roebuck and Com-

pany—thanks to the popularity of its mail-order catalogue—handled five times as many orders as it had the year before. Although trucks were used to haul Parcel Post packages as early as 1913, old-fashioned horse power held on until the 1920s.

The speed of the new powered vehicles, and the productivity improvements they brought, soon ran up against speed limits. In fact, in October 1913, about 100 drivers for the Postal Transfer Service Company, a mail contractor in New York City, went on strike. Chief among the drivers' complaints was that the police had recently decided to enforce the city's 20 mph speed limit, which was making it difficult for them to meet the company's schedules. (The strike was ▶

to best do their jobs safely,” the Postal Service said in a press release.

On Jan. 20, 2015, USPS began the acquisition process with a formal request for information and a kickoff meeting for technology and automotive suppliers. “The robust and open process was designed to attract the most innovative and cutting-edge technological solutions,” the Postal Service said.

NALC has been involved in the process, advising the Postal Service on the point of view of letter carriers. As then-Director of City Delivery Brian Renfroe said in the April 2015 *Postal Record*, “We have had weekly meetings with the Postal Service to discuss various city delivery issues, such as what should be included in a new vehicle. Our main objective is to ensure that any new vehicle is safe, ergonomic and as convenient as possible for letter carriers, and accommodates the work we do now and will do in the future.”

Letter carrier input was included in the specifications for what the suppliers must include in their designs. “We have spent a considerable amount of time talking to letter carriers in different parts of the country about what they would like to see in a new vehicle,” Renfroe, now NALC's executive vice president, continued. “While some of the input is specific to certain climates or geographic areas, there are quite a few common suggestions. The Postal Service has incorporated our suggestions into a lengthy document that includes specifications for the next-generation delivery vehicle.”

Details of what is expected in the vehicles have emerged, based on the requirements USPS has put forward. One requirement: Letter carriers must be able to stand up in the vehicle and walk to the rear of the vehicle, where more room for packages is expected.

“To this end, the Postal Service has asked automakers to consider a ‘fully enclosed van style body’ that would have internal cargo capacity and even sliding side doors,” *The New York Times* reported in March 2015.

Additionally, USPS wants backup cameras and warning systems, ergonomic seats and doors, airbags and antiskid surfaces, the newspaper reported. Fuel efficiency is expected to be a major focus as well.

USPS then reviewed the responses and whittled the list down to 15 suppliers, determined to be prequalified, to submit proposals to develop prototype vehicles. In October 2015, USPS gave those 15 suppliers access to the processing and delivery environment and employees, and asked them to submit proposals for vehicles designed for USPS' delivery needs.

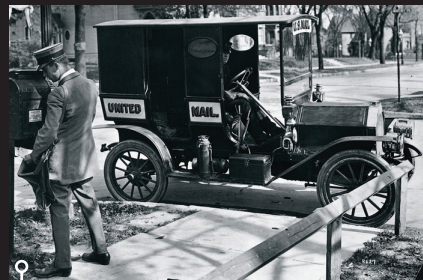
As part of that process, NALC selected three letter carriers to provide detailed, ▶



Motorcycle, circa 1911



Parcel Post truck, 1913



Automobile, circa 1914



Automobile, 1930

unsuccessful—the company, which had a history of vigorous anti-union activities, fired all the striking drivers.)

Within a few years, the Post Office Dept. began buying its own trucks instead of relying on contract trucks and drivers. One of the advantages of postal-owned trucks was their versatility. Whereas the use of contracted vehicles was restricted to precise contract terms, postal-owned trucks could fill needs as they arose. Thus, the same vehicle could be used to collect and dispatch mail, transport mail between facilities, deliver Parcel Post, and even transport letter carriers to their delivery routes, saving the cost of streetcar fare. The largest of the trucks could carry 15 employees and was used primarily to transport letter carriers to their routes.

Jeeps were used for mail delivery by rural carriers in the 1940s. In the 1950s, right-hand drive Jeep models were introduced for city carriers on suburban routes. Jeeps remained in general use through the late 1980s.

In 1941, Highway Post Offices (HPOs)—essentially buses outfitted as portable post offices—made their first appearance when a route was established between Washington, DC, and Harrisonburg, VA, serving more than 20 intermediate post offices. HPOs were similar in function to railway post offices. Like railway mail clerks aboard trains, clerks on board HPOs sorted mail *en route* for transfer to post offices and connecting routes. The number of HPOs peaked in 1959, at 172. The spread of mechanized mail-sorting facilities in the 1960s and 1970s gradu-

ally rendered hand-sorting of mail by traveling clerks obsolete. The last HPO rolled between Cincinnati and Cleveland on June 30, 1974.

In the 1950s, the Post Office Dept. began fully motorizing city delivery routes. Using motor vehicles, letter carriers could deliver more mail, more quickly.

The right-hand drive Zip Van, one of the first large vehicles designed specifically for city carriers, allowed a carrier to drive while standing up and easily deliver mail and packages.

The Westcoaster mailster was introduced in the early 1950s. With a top safe speed of 35 mph, it was a cross between a mail van and a motorcycle. The strange vehicle soon showed its limits. Many letter carriers disliked the mailsters because they were hard

through input on the design ideas letter carriers need: Amanda Greer of St. Paul, MN Branch 28; Reed Ordoyne of Houma-Thibodaux-Lockport, LA Branch 2464; and Derrick Williams of St. Louis Branch 343.

Last September, the Postal Service awarded contracts to six suppliers:

- AM General LLC of South Bend, IN
- Karsan Otomotive Sanayii ve Ticaret A.S. of Bursa, Turkey
- Mahindra North American Technical Center Inc. of Troy, MI
- Oshkosh HD LLC of Oshkosh, WI
- Utilimaster Corp. of Bristol, IN
- VT Hackney Inc. of Washington, NC

These six are expected to produce a total of 50 prototype vehicles as part of the next phase. The suppliers can subcontract with additional suppliers, if necessary. While there is no requirement that the vehicles be union or

American made, the NALC will voice that as its preference.

“Half of the prototypes will feature hybrid and new technologies, including alternative fuel capabilities,” USPS’ press release said. “The prototypes will represent a variety of vehicle sizes and drive configurations, in addition to advanced powertrains and a range of hybrid technologies.”

“The testing, we anticipate, will begin [in the] fall of 2017,” Postmaster General Megan Brennan told the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform in a Feb. 7 hearing. “The suppliers have one year in which to develop the prototypes.”

As part of the building of the prototypes, one company brought Ordoyne and Greer to its facilities in Milton Keynes, England, where the carriers inspected a prototype and gave the design team their impressions and

suggestions. Even as the carriers were making suggestions, the design team was contacting suppliers to see about incorporating the modifications.

Brennan said that when testing begins, it is expected to go on for 12 to 18 months. “We like to test those vehicles in different climates and different topography and the like,” she said. USPS will



Postmaster General Megan Brennan testified before the House Oversight committee in February on the vehicle procurement process.



Jeep, circa 1950



Highway Post Office, 1953



Mailster, 1964



Zip Van, circa 1964

to maneuver in snow or wind, prone to tipping and offered little protection in crashes. They became known as “Westcoasters” because they worked well only in areas with consistently fair weather. The number of mailsters in use peaked in 1966, at about 17,700. By the early 1970s, they largely were replaced by the Jeeps that many rural carriers already used.

Today, most city carriers drive a Long Life Vehicle (LLV), one of the first postal vehicles designed from the ground up for postal use. In the 1980s, the Postal Service invited manufacturers to build prototypes for testing. Three finalists built by Poveco, American Motors and jointly by Grumman and General Motors (GM) competed at a track in Laredo, TX, in 1985. The test vehicles were put through the paces to

simulate the demands of mail delivery. For 24,000 miles, they were driven over potholes, starting, stopping and carrying heavy loads over and over.

The Grumman/GM vehicle came out the winner. The Postal Service ordered 99,150 LLVs costing \$1.1 billion, the largest vehicle order ever placed by the agency. The Long Life Vehicles were produced in Grumman’s Montgomery, PA, plant. During the height of production, the company was producing 100 postal trucks a day.

The last LLV rolled off the assembly line in 1994. While it has bought and used various off-the-shelf trucks and vans since then while trying to maintain the aging LLV fleet, the Postal Service now is searching for the next generation postal vehicle to replace the LLV. **PR**

## Vehicular safety resources

Director of Safety and Health Manuel Peralta Jr. has put extensive resources on vehicle concerns on the NALC website at [www.nalc.org/workplace-issues/safety-and-health](http://www.nalc.org/workplace-issues/safety-and-health). Topics include vehicle fires, park points, maintenance issues and much more.

test each prototype for six months on a three-week rotating basis in Arizona, Detroit and Northern Virginia.

The tests will help determine which vehicle is the most cost efficient and which design elements of each best fit letter carrier work.

“We’d look at the life-cycle costs,” she said. “We’ll also look at, certainly fuel efficiency, and ensure we have industry-best standard with safety features and the like. And obviously, the efficiency for our employees to be able to maneuver safely in the back of the vehicle.”

But Brennan was quick to apply the brakes to questions about when the fleet of LLVs would be replaced, primarily due to funding concerns and the need for postal reform legislation.

“We’ve deferred [replacing the LLVs] and it’s why the vehicles are beyond their expected lifespan and it’s why we’re

incurring these costs to keep them on the road,” she said. “So the sooner we can get this bill passed, the sooner we can get an outcome from the [Postal Regulatory Commission’s] 10-year price review, and again it’s incumbent upon management to continue to do our part to control costs.

“We’ve made no decisions on production,” she said. “We’re merely in a prototype testing phase.”

### Off-the-shelf and other potential options

In September, USPS also announced it was looking for proposals for commercial off-the-shelf, right-hand drive delivery vehicles.

“The Postal Service seeks to explore a wide variety of available options during this research phase, and will evaluate any commercial off-the-shelf vehicles proposed as a result of this [request for proposals] as we continue

to assess the delivery fleet mix,” the agency said.

During the February hearing, Postmaster General Brennan told the House committee that the proposals were still out and that USPS was prepared to explore this option.

“We’ll do our due diligence, depending on how large that potential supplier pool is, but we’d want to move with pace, given the need,” she said.

She also explained that there could be a third option. “In addition to the Next Generation Delivery Vehicle and now the commercial off-the-shelf solution we’ll evaluate, we have a bridge strategy where we typically replaced in the past, say in the last two years, up to 12,000 vehicles at a time,” she said. “Again, the decision will be made based on available funding and certainly based on supplier ability to provide the vehicles for us.” **PR**

## Old postal vehicles finding new lives

**F**or many letter carriers, at the end of the day, we're happy to get out of our postal vehicles. But at the same time, the old vans and trucks often bring back fond memories. Some retirees even buy old vehicles to restore them to their glory; others take out the welding torch and construct entirely new and fun vehicular inventions out of them.

Most Americans, letter carriers or not, feel nostalgia and love for postal vehicles, and some find new uses for them long after their mail days are over. Many a food truck, plumber's van or private delivery vehicle (including many used by rural carriers) were once driven by a city carrier.

In this issue of *The Postal Record*, we take a look at a few retired postal vehicles that found new life after their delivery days ended.

### Zippping around again

After losing both his wife and a daughter to cancer, retired Derby, CT Branch 109 carrier **Frank Haines** filled his life with pleasant memories by



Frank Haines' 1963 Studebaker Zip Van 07/11/2014

buying a 1963 Studebaker Zip Van like the one he once drove on the job.

"I sat around my house feeling sorry for myself," he said, "and then I said, 'You know what? I have to get out and do something. I need a hobby.'" In 2008, Haines happened on an ad in a magazine featuring the Zip Van and was smitten. He loved it so much that he flew to Oregon to buy it at auction and took it home to Connecticut on a trailer.

The Zip Van went into service just after Haines started carrying the mail for the Post Office Dept. (POD) in Seymour, CT, in 1962. The Zip was right-hand drive with a sliding door on the driver's side, a

The Zip Van had two gas pedals. The one on top operates like a normal gas pedal. The lever on the floor operates by sliding to the left.



garage door-style back door and no door on the left side. With two gas pedals and a highly adjustable seat, a letter carrier could drive the Zip either seated or standing.

The Zip Van is powered by a 170-cc overhead six-cylinder 112-horsepower engine and a Warner three-speed automatic transmission. At 143 inches long, with an 84-inch wheelbase and a gross vehicle weight of 4,350 pounds, the Zip Van isn't a race car or a long-distance



Haines with his new renovation project: a '50s-era Mailster.

ride. Haines drives it only to local car shows or around town.

“It’s a very slow truck,” he said. “Even when they were brand new, they didn’t go very fast. They were made for stopping 500 times a day.”

The POD bought 4,238 Zip Vans and kept them running into the early 1970s. They were likely named to echo the new Zone Improvement Plan (ZIP) code system that the department had just introduced, with the help of cartoon character “Mr. Zip” to promote it. Haines carries a plywood sign bearing Mr. Zip’s image to car shows. The plates on Haines’ van, MRZIP, have caused locals who see him driving it to bestow the nickname on him.

Having been stored on a farm in the high desert of Oregon where rainfall is scarce, the van required very little restoration.

“The body was in great shape,” he said, “which was good, because I don’t know anything about fabricating steel—I’m just an old mailman.”

Haines estimates that his truck is about 98 percent original. The only major restoration work required was rebuilding the engine. Haines and his son-in-law removed the engine and left the rebuilding to a professional. The seat belt—the Zip Van was the first postal truck to have them—is the original. It also was the first postal vehicle to have a backup alarm, which still works in his truck. Even the decals on the dashboard are original.

When an international Studebaker show came to nearby Rhode Island last year, Haines took his van to it. Despite all the gleaming, perfectly restored, fancy Studebakers on display, Haines’ utilitarian postal van won the prize for best truck.

“I was blown away,” he said. “They told me they hadn’t seen

a Zip Van at an international show for 25 years. It isn’t perfect, but I don’t want to make it perfect.”

At a 100th anniversary celebration of the opening of the Seymour Post Office this year, Haines’ van made a perfect centerpiece for the memorabilia on display.

Haines is building on his hobby—he recently bought a 1950s-era Westcoaster mailster, a one-seat, three-wheel delivery vehicle that was more cart than truck. He plans to restore it, but it will take more work than the Zip Van did.

Whether at shows or just driving through his town, everyone loves the Zip Van. “I get very good reactions,” Haines said “I got very lucky to find one.”

## Frozen delivery

Many a Seattle-area child, and plenty of grown-ups, cheer when they see the Moonie Icy Tunes ice cream truck. The premium ice cream caterer delivers its frozen product in a refurbished right-hand drive postal Jeep DJ.

Owner Sharon Crosetto bought the 1982 American General Jeep DJ-5, a version of the original postal Jeep introduced in 1965, from a private seller. First she had to fix standard wear and tear, such as rust. “The floor

pan was rusted, but it wasn’t anything that couldn’t be fixed,” she said. Then came modifications, including swapping out the original 2.5 liter General Motors Iron Duke four-cylinder engine for a Chevrolet 305 small-block V8, rebuilding the Chrysler 904 transmission, adding a new rear end capable of hauling ice cream carts and installing an on-board ice cream freezer.

Unlike a standard “dingaling” ice cream truck that drives through neighborhoods selling treats, Moonie Icy Tunes caters events such as birthday parties, picnics and business meetings. “That little ice cream Jeep holds more than 1,200 pieces of ice cream,” Crosetto said.



Using an old vehicle takes Crosetto's customers back to their childhood. "People want that nostalgia and the memories of what they had as a kid," she said. But unlike many of the ice cream trucks that ply the streets, Crosetto's Jeep serves fancier treats, including desserts for adults with names like "flute limoncello" (served in a champagne glass) or "coppa pistachio crema," along with premium ice cream sandwiches, popsicles and other novelties that kids love and adults remember from childhood.

"The Jeep is very popular in the Seattle-Tacoma area," she said. Crosetto often serves clients hosting meetings in a nearby convention center. "We bring the Jeep right inside the building," she said, "because she's so cute and clean and she doesn't leak oil."

The Jeep is high-tech, too. Crosetto brought her experience working with the Microsoft automotive group to her ice cream business. "I knew that the general public was still looking for the nostalgic memories of an ice cream truck," she said, "but the business had to change and soon the technology took over."

"The ice cream Jeep has its own wi-fi hotspot, so we take full advantage of more than a handful of car computing technologies to help run the business more efficiently," she said.

The Moonie Icy Tunes Jeep is tracked, too. "GPS navigation and Bluetooth are of course a necessity these days to run a delivery-based business," she said. "How fast are my drivers going, where they are, *et cetera*." She even monitors the freezer temperature remotely to ensure quality.

Even though her Jeep isn't used to sell ice cream in the street, it still has the original right-hand drive from its postal days. Crosetto said her employees rarely



Jim Bye and his postal rat rod.

have trouble using the right-hand drive, though—"I don't think it's a big deal."

A self-described car person, Crosetto keeps up with other fans of postal vehicles. "People who are into the postal Jeeps are *really* into them," she said.

## Hottest mail jeep ever

One guy who is really into his postal Jeep has turned it into something altogether different.

Retired letter carrier **Jim Bye** of Camillus, NY, bought an old Jeep DJ-5 on eBay and transformed it into a head-turning postal hot rod—or rather, a "rat rod," exaggerating its original design.

"It was in pretty rough shape, but it was going to be a rat rod, so that didn't matter," Bye said. "After knocking some of the dents out of it, we removed the body and welded up the frame."

The body is original but the front and rear are fabricated—the front end is an open "speedway"-style compartment with a two-inch drop showing off a 292-cubic inch, six-cylinder engine from a 1985 GMC truck.

"It has zoomy pipes with motorcycle baffles in them, but it still rumbles pretty good," said Bye, a member of Syracuse, NY Branch 134. He built his own pickup box and combined it with the rear end from a American Motors Gremlin, adding distinctive Mickey Thompson tires in the back to complete the look.

Bye's rat rod proudly sports a Postal Service paint scheme and related logos—the current USPS logo on the left side and the older one on the right. It sports the original postal paint scheme of white with red and blue stripes. Bye

even keeps his old satchel and a few boxes with fake mail inside for added effect.

Despite its speedway style, the vehicle is street legal and Bye likes to drive it around town. As an unexpected postal vehicle, the rat rod attracts attention. "You can't go anywhere without drawing a crowd," Bye said. "It's a hit at cruise-ins, car shows and parades."

Unlike many owners of classic cars, Bye welcomes people to touch or get in the rat rod. "Climb right in there and put the mailbag over your shoulder and take your picture," he tells them. "Most of these cars that are at shows have a \$40,000 paint job and people don't want anyone breathing on them, let alone touching them. But I say climb right in there, I'll take your picture, because it's a rat rod and you can't hurt it. It's a fun vehicle."

Despite a modest investment, Bye's creation won accolades at the Syracuse Nationals auto show. "Although it's not fancy, it was picked as one of the top 100 cars out of 8,500," he said. "It just goes to show you that you don't have to spend \$45,000 to have a car people want to see. If I said I have \$5,000 in this car, I'd probably be overestimating."

Bye recently capitalized on the attention at the auto show to benefit the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA), NALC's official charity. His branch set up a booth next to the car and asked for donations, raising more than \$4,800 in three days.

"I built it as homage to my postal career," he said. "I had a great time being a letter carrier, made a lot of good friends and fun memories." **PR**