



Not Your Mot

By Jim Wilder

Not all vans are created equal. If you don't believe it, park Mom's mini-van next to a 15-passenger van and compare height, length and width. The 15-passenger van will prove to be larger as it has more in common with a truck. So, if vans are as big as a truck, with truck suspension and tires, shouldn't they be treated like a truck?

The distinctions among trucks, vans and cars are critical as they determine handling characteristics. The key difference between vans and cars is the van's high center of gravity, which increases the chance for roll-overs. Loaded vans are heavy, and their weight requires long stopping distances.

The van body makes it hard for the driver to see when backing or maneuvering through tight areas. The back end of the body extends beyond the rear axle and can create another problem. This added length allows seating for six more people, which places considerable weight behind the rear axle. This weight changes the way the van will handle and how it will react to quick steering changes.

A fully loaded van is heavy, so it is critical that correct tires are mounted and correct tire pressure is maintained. Tubeless tires tend to bleed off air over time. It is important to check pressure instead of doing just a "visual inspection." Tires often look fine when the van is empty, even though they may be under-inflated. Check tire pressure with a gauge, not your eyeball or foot. Under-inflated tires heat up and cause blowouts.



her's Mini-van

Manufacturer's recommended tire size and pressures are listed on the driver's door post. Compare these with the size and pressures on the tires before you drive a van. If they do not match, do not drive the van until corrections are made. This rule is even more important with older vans, because they probably will have replacement tires installed.

Marines "make things happen." If a round, black tire from an unattended wheelbarrow will fit, guess what tire may be on your van. A recent check of 10 vans found that nine of them had the wrong tires mounted.

In two recent crashes involving 15 passengers, five Marines were killed. Driver experience played a role in both mishaps. The first driver had been licensed for five years but had never driven a 15-passenger van. During an extended trip, a fully loaded van's left rear tire blew out. The driver was within the posted speed limit of 65 mph, but he lost control, and the van rolled several times. Two passengers were killed and several were injured.

The second mishap involved a driver who had held a driver's license for six months before being assigned to drive a 15-passenger van for the first time. While transporting 11 Marines, the driver lost control, and the van rolled; three Marines were killed, and several others were seriously injured.

Transporting Marines is a common undertaking. Unfortunately, routine tasks usually claim the most lives. The keen eyes used to plan more complex opera-

tions are focused elsewhere when mundane tasks are carried out.

Any operation that exposes Marines to hazards needs to be examined ahead of time. Use ORM to identify hazards—in this case, driver experience, van size, load, speed, and distance. 🚗

