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# The Robb Report COLLECTION™

Great Machines Special Issue

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## Great Machines

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# JetVan for the Jet Set



*Becker's JetVan offers luxurious personal transportation in an understated and practical custom package.*





#### BECKER AUTOMOTIVE JETVAN

**H**OWARD BECKER OF Becker Automotive Design espouses a new form of transportation based on chauffeur-driven utility. "Not only does it give you the ability to rest, relax, and enjoy," he asserts, "but, given the mobile office, the amount of concentrated work you can do in an hour's commute can be enhanced by high-speed wireless Internet. When you get to the office, you're an hour ahead of where you would have been."

Consider this Mercedes Sprinter-based Becker JetVan custom-built for Eric and Diane Holm, who own a chain of restaurants in Florida and Georgia. They also own "his and her" Bentleys, Benz SLs, and Land Rovers, and a private jet. They are well-accustomed to comfortable, quick, high-quality transportation.

The base U.S.-market Dodge Sprinter is a thinly disguised Mercedes-Benz commercial van powered by a federalized 2.7-liter turbo-diesel 5-cylinder engine producing 154 hp and 243 ft lbs of torque. But Becker's Sprinter-based conversions are anything but standard. Appropriately dubbed JetVans for their executive aircraftlike interiors, they are easily the most functional, well-designed, and opulently equipped Becker Automotive creations yet.

The exterior is transformed with Mercedes-Benz trim augmented by tastefully designed front spoilers, headlights, tubular side steps and custom wheels and tires—and

nothing is ostentatious. "Our customers want a low-key presence on the outside," Becker explains. The engine is tuned to deliver approximately 200 hp and more than 300 ft lbs of torque. Bigger brakes, a better-balanced center of gravity resulting from substantial floor insulation, and a choice of suspension improvements round out the package. Soft Ride provides gentler springs that are teamed with beefier shocks and sway bars, and a custom-designed independent rear suspension—offering the ultimate combination of agility and rear passenger comfort.

The best part of the JetVan is its custom-designed interior: a state-of-the-art mobile office married to a top-of-the-line home theater—an executive jet for the road. "The substantial application of lightweight aviation materials is apparent in our work," Becker says. "Until now few have been used in automobile conversions, partly because we're innovating and partly because of the expense of those materials. We're not trying to outdo our customers' private jets or luxury cars, but we are trying to provide a seamless transition from one to the other. A vehicle like this looks and feels like the rest of their world while fulfilling their needs for room, privacy, and function."

One thing Becker learned along the way is how to please A-list artists such as Burt Bacharach, Cher, and Barbra Streisand. "They're not just kicking back and enjoying music or a movie," he says. "They're listening to their own



## GREAT MACHINES

### LUXURY TRANSPORTATION



*Luxury appointments recall a private jet, with reclining seats that are unmatched in comfort.*

stuff and dissecting it. To say that they're critical would be very accurate, so we have been well schooled in how to satisfy their standards. We got schooled in video as well by some of the entertainment industry's top performers, managers, producers, and directors.

"The outcome is that we can compete well with a high-quality home entertainment environment," he continues. "The music can be powerful but must be stress-free—good at high volume but very accurate, very rich, and very comfortable to listen to. That's what our customers expect video-wise as well."

In the 1980s, the company began developing and building its own parametric equalizers for acoustically tuning each vehicle's interior. "When we're finished," he says, "it's what the entertainment industry calls 'voicing a room.' Once you've got the basic room as good as you can get it, the next step is to correct any problems, which has been done with parametric equalization in sound studios, theaters and high-quality home environments for a generation. It's the guy in the back of the concert with the big mixing board—an absolutely vital element."

Becker's mobile work environment includes a laptop with a high-speed Internet card that fits into a port replicator to integrate with a wireless keyboard, gyro-mouse, and printer, and displays on a large LCD screen. Visitors' laptops also can be plugged into the system.

Becker JetVans are built to order, and because customers' requirements can vary significantly, the company offers six floor plans and two wheelbases. "Some customers want more than four-passenger seating," Becker explains. "Some don't want the divider so the driver and front passenger can walk through to the back."

The pictured example features seating for four, privacy curtains, and an array of advanced—yet easy-to-use—electronics fit for Air Force One. A pair of ultra-comfortable, electronically adjustable custom recliners slide eight inches forward or back between the rear wheel wells to optimize cargo space behind them. Three characteristics make them unique: The seat backs recline to the optimum position for crash safety, leg extenders deploy electronically from under the cushions, and the bases rock back to distribute body weight evenly from head to heel, for the lowest possible stress. The console between them contains two aviation-style stowaway tables that can slide fore and aft, which are made of a strong aluminum-

skinned and hand-veneered honeycomb material.

Two large rear-facing buckets sit behind the divider, with a 1.5 cu ft top-opening refrigerator/freezer between them. Along one side of the van is a well-secured row of glasses and an upholstered ice bucket atop a beverage service cabinet. Along the other are the mobile office, a magazine rack, and a beautiful burlwood and upholstery liquor cabinet with safety-glass door panes.

The overhead lighting emulates that of a private jet aircraft with the most advanced LED strip, map, and dome lighting. "It's very expensive," Becker says, "but has tremendous longevity and puts out a light that I've heard described as 'white sunshine'—easy on your eyes, but it illuminates wonderfully in terms of detail and reading ability. And all the lighting is on dimmer circuits so you can adjust the intensity to the level you want."

The Holms' JetVan sports factory-original, two-stage silver metallic paint and rolls on matching Brabus wheels. "Eric has been instrumental in selecting a lot of the function," Becker says, "while Diane has been tremendous in working with us on the cosmetic and interior appointments." We think they've achieved a new standard in custom ground transportation.

In addition to the new Becker JetVan, Becker Automotive Design transforms Ford Excursion, GMC Yukon Denali, and Cadillac Escalade SUVs into fully equipped and gorgeously turned-out mobile lounges, offices, and theaters ranging in price from \$125,000 to \$275,000. Comprehensive armoring programs are available at additional cost. —GARY WITZENBURG

*Becker Automotive Design, 805.487.5227, [www.beckerautodesign.com](http://www.beckerautodesign.com)*





## House on Wheels

### EARTHROAMER XPEDITION

**Y**OU WANT TO COMMUNE WITH nature atop a mountain or in the desert, but you do not want to hike to your camping destination, or sleep in a tent on the hard ground. No crowded campsite available? No electricity? No water? No problem! The EarthRoamer Expedition camper will save the day—and the night.

Designed as a stand-alone, four-season, high-end unit by founders Michele Connolly, president and CEO, and Bill Swails, chief designer and COO, the EarthRoamer uses rooftop solar panels instead of electric connections or generators. Plus it can tote up to 100 gallons, using an optional 50-gallon tank.

The venture came about in 1998, when Connolly and Swails tried to satisfy their extreme adventure vehicle needs with a pickup and a pop-up camper. Today they transform Ford F-450 and F-550 turbo-diesel-powered pickups into the best expedition campers money can buy. And they test their energy-efficient solar-powered homes on wheels in extreme conditions.

The luxuriously appointed Ford pickups seat four and sport four-wheel drive. Their quiet and efficient 6.0-liter turbocharged diesel V-8—which runs well on diesel or nontoxic, renewable, biodegradable biodiesel fuel—pushes 325 hp and a pumped-up 570 ft lbs of torque through a 5-speed TorqShift automatic. You even can haul a trailer full of toys with the vehicle's 10,000-pound towing capacity.

The lightweight, thermal and acoustic insulated carbon fiber-reinforced composite camper body is attached with

an innovative TriMount system that isolates most torsional (twisting) forces. The cleverly designed cabinetry is crafted from premium materials, and the commercial-grade upholstery is tough and easy to clean. Even the fasteners, connectors, and hardware are the finest available.

Aside from the gear, the living space offers 6.5 feet of stand-up height, a California king-size over-cab bed, an enclosed bathroom/shower with an expandable changing room, hardwood dovetail drawers on extension slides, granite counters, and fluorescent and halogen lighting. There is no need for propane, since all systems use diesel from the 19-gallon front and 40-gallon rear tanks or electricity from two 255-amp-hour absorbed glass-mat batteries, which are charged by twin 185-watt solar panels and dual 130-amp engine alternators. The heater is a 13,600 Btu diesel-fuel unit with a thermostat; air-conditioning is 5,500 Btu high-efficiency digital electric with remote.

The traveler goes for \$139,332 above the sticker price of \$42,500 to \$46,000 for the heavy duty SuperCab or Crew Cab pickup. Other options include a 15,000-pound electric winch, HID driving and off-road lights, a backup camera with LCD display, integrated GPS navigation, and several audio/video systems, including satellite TV and rear headrest video screens with wireless headphones—everything you need to enjoy your away-from-it-all, life-altering expedition experience. —GARY WITZENBURG

*EarthRoamer Expedition Vehicles, 720.304.3174,  
www.earthroamer.com*