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Veterinary Vehicles: Born in Iowa

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(This is the first in a series of articles spotlighting Iowa's major role in the production of on-site veterinary equipment).

Cleansing sea otters at a California oil spill, examining thoroughbreds at a Florida racetrack, vaccinating the housecat at a home for the handicapped in Texas, collecting blood from veterinary patients in Pennsylvania and consulting a pork production conglomerate at a confinement unit in North Carolina: while these events seem totally unrelated on the surface, they indeed share a common theme. The single, largest piece of equipment utilized at these on-site veterinary campaigns was manufactured here in Iowa.

The year 1947 saw the beginning of Dodgen Industries in Humboldt, IA. Its early products centered around equipment for bulk feed handling. By the late 1960's, travel trailers and motor homes had been added to the sales line. In 1976, the company was approached by a Washington state veterinarian with a concept of customizing a motorcoach to afford him on-site veterinary care capabilities. The success of this first unit led to ongoing interest from other practitioners and further sales. In recent years Dodgen has manufactured nearly 200 mobile veterinary units for mixed, equine and small animal practitioners.

The heavily populated states of New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Florida, Texas and California boast the highest number of registrations of such vehicles. In the small animal realm, this likely reflects the fact that these states offer a larger number of typical clients. Those who often utilize such services are families where both parents work full time jobs of odd shifts (convenience), the elderly (without adequate transportation or physically unable to transport) and the handicapped.

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The turn around time from initial order to final production date of a veterinary motor coach is typically 6 to 8 weeks. Production centers around a "team" concept where 4 craftsmen produce each unit from start to finish. Upon completion, these same individuals then sign a plaque which is prominently displayed within the interior cabin. Delivery is either via pick-up by the new owner or transportation to the ultimate destination by retired Humboldt area residents.

While most veterinary practitioners opt for the mainstay of the Dodgen customer base, "customizing" a unit for more unusual, but related purposes is willingly performed. The company has just recently delivered two such vehicles: The Animal Bloodmobile purchased by the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and the sea otter and avian detoxification veterinary motor coach and trailer for use at oil spill sites by the California Department of Fish and Game. The following photographs highlight both of these custom units, as well as those offered in the company's traditional line.

Our next issue will focus on Iowa's premier marketing position in production of pickup and utility truck "vet boxes". This one piece of veterinary equipment has proven itself of decades to be an extremely valuable asset to on-site care, particularly for the large animal, mixed and equine practitioners.
The Animal Bloodmobile recently purchased by the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

Interior of Animal Bloodmobile.

Sea Otter and Avian Detoxification Veterinary Motor Coach and Trailer recently purchased for use at oil spills by the California Department of Fish and Game.