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Born in Iowa: Veterinary Vehicles, Part Three

Thomas A. Carlson, D.V.M., M.S.*

(This is the third in a series of articles spotlighting Iowa’s dominant position in the production of on-site veterinary equipment.)

Bowie Manufacturing was founded in 1961 by M.C. Bowie, D.V.M. (ISU ’46) who had realized the lack of products addressing the mobility needs of veterinary practitioners. Since its inception, the company has been located in Lake City, IA. The business was purchased by its current owner, M.E. Peterson, in 1977. Originally, Bowie produced only chassis-mounted mobile veterinary bodies. In 1970, however, the company added insert bodies to its product line.

All major phases involved in the design and manufacture of its products are performed directly by Bowie in its Lake City plant. The company thus has numerous staff members with specific expertise in the areas of art and graphics, engineering, fiberglass production and assembly.

The aforementioned chassis-mounted unit is still unique to the Bowie line. Its gullwing doors give tremendous accessibility to the liner storage compartments, as well as protection from the elements to the attendant veterinarian. This particular design is said to be the strong favorite in the Bowie line among female veterinarians. Male veterinarians appear somewhat more split between the chassis-mounted and the insert bodies.

The majority of Bowie’s product line may be fitted with such amenities as hot and cold water taps, electrical outlets, heaters, and refrigerators. An optional and exclusive Bowie/Polaroid film system allows for efficient on-site-development of radiographs. Concerns over controlled pharmaceuticals and other valuables are addressed via available automatic door locks and burglar alarm systems.

A total of 15 models are currently manufactured by Bowie to fit virtually all full size and compact pickups as well as vans and sport-utility vehicles. Bowie bodies may be found in all 50 states, as well as dozens of foreign countries scattered over five continents. Domestic deliveries are accomplished via truck and trailer by Bowie employees. Units destined for foreign delivery are shipped by air from Eppley Airfield in Omaha, NE.

The company can now produce a custom colored unit to match that of the particular truck upon which it is mounted. The standard color of white has also recently been tinted to exactly match the same shade now used by Ford, Dodge, and GM on their truck lines.

The durability of the Bowie body is noted by the fact that over 80% of the 18,000 units manufactured over the last 32 years are still in active service. One particular body based in Ohio has outlasted 12 trucks and has logged in excess of 1,500,000 miles!

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*Ben* - Susan Beever