

# Unihome 36'

Foretravel introduces the U225, a new luxury liner with a monocoque chassis and an innovative rubber-torsion suspension

**Bob Livingston**

## **MOTORHOME PREVIEW**

**R**ide quality is usually high on the list of priorities of potential motorhome enthusiasts. After years of tolerating bread-truck-like handling, the motorhome industry has been making great chassis-performance strides to satisfy the demands of more discriminating buyers. Manufacturers have responded by building coaches with air-suspension systems, improved spring rates, monocoque designs, better shocks — systems that work in harmony to create more civilized handling for passenger hauling. The ultimate, of course, would be to emulate the ride quality of a bus conversion, but the cost would be prohibitive.

Foretravel of Nacogdoches, Texas, set out years ago to achieve ride characteristics similar to those of bus conversions — but in smaller, luxurious motorhomes that don't break the bank accounts of potential customers. The result is the introduction of a downsized Unihome, dubbed the U225, with an innovative suspension from BFGoodrich made especially for Foretravel.

The U225 is a smaller version of the Foretravel's flagship monocoque-chassis Unihome and is designed to complement the line. The original Unihome sports a higher profile, has an outboard air-bag suspension system and is available in sizes up to 40 feet. The U225 also features a monocoque chassis, but initially it will be offered only in a 36-foot length.

When asked where the U225 fit into the company's marketing scheme, Clarence Fore, Foretravel founder, stated, "We felt that there is



a market for a smaller size motorhome with some of the Unihome's quality features."

While the U225 is not exactly inexpensive at \$176,500, it does have many of the features found in ultra high-line coaches such as the suspension that's been used under Eagle buses, that are used for exclusive conversions. The suspension system for the U225, called the Velvet-Ride Torsilastic Suspension System, has been designed by BFGoodrich for use in the new Foretravel model.

The independent suspension system developed by BFGoodrich is designed around its Torsilastic rubber-torsion bar. The Torsilastic spring is an integral unit consisting of an inner metal shaft surrounded by a molded rubber cylinder with an outer metal tube. Foretravel fastens the outer tube to the vehicle axle, and the inner shaft is attached to the chassis via suspension arms and special Torsilastic shackles. The unit absorbs impact through the molded rubber cylinder, as it is twisted by the movement of the center shaft due to forces from the axle and chassis.

Improved stability is gained by



*Foretravel U225 has the advantage of Unihome's monocoque chassis and the BFGoodrich Torsilastic suspension.*

mounting the Velvet-Ride components close to the outer perimeter of the coach. The system already receives high marks for steering precision and handling, especially while



negotiating windy roads. Fine-tuning of the suspension and shocks could enhance ride and handling.

During our exclusive preview and test-drive of the coach, we noticed

that the effect of passing 18-wheelers was hardly noticeable, and body roll was tightly controlled even on winding roads. The motorhome stayed steady while deliberately wandering

off the pavement onto deeply rutted dirt shoulders.

The suspension feel gives the impression that it was made for the coach. The U225 has a 228-inch wheelbase, but its scant turning radius allows this 36-footer to maneuver better than some smaller coaches.

Lack of noise inside the rear-engine coach is impressive; even the stove top is silenced by the smooth ride. Few road oscillations can be felt, even over rougher roads, except in the rear of the coach, where a slight bumpiness is noticeable, but mild enough to allow one to lie on the bed comfortably while the motorhome is on the road.

Although the BFGoodrich Velvet-Ride system is relatively unknown in the motorhome industry, it has a very impressive history in exclusive buses. Eagle International, the bus that is used for about 90 percent of the mansions on wheels owned by entertainers, has used only the Velvet-Ride for almost 30 years. It is also used by Dina Autobuses of Mexico and Flexible.

According to BFGoodrich, the system reduces vibration up to 50 percent compared to coaches equipped with air-suspension systems, because the coach is literally cradled in rubber. The suspension is designed to provide a million miles of service with virtually no maintenance, say BFGoodrich engineers. The Velvet-Ride system is very simple and basic with no rods, bushings or compressors to service. Foretravel says the suspension compensates for wear by centering itself in the rubber-covered cradle, so maintenance costs and adjustments are greatly reduced.

The U225 is powered by a Cummins 6BTA 5.9 inline-six diesel, rated at 230 horsepower and 605 lb-ft of torque at 1600 rpm. The engine is linked to an Allison MT643 four-speed automatic transmission. The coach has a 22,500-pound gross vehicle weight rating and a gross vehicle combined weight rating of 24,000 pounds.

A number of basic floorplans similar to those found in the larger Unihome are available, including a side bath with twin beds, a side bath with an island bed and a side bath with an island bed and a dinette. Traditional crafted solid-wood cabinetry and a long list of Foretravel features are included as standard equipment.

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