

# A number of good things come in big packages, too

11 Champion Country, May, 1990

What better place to test the electronic four-wheel drive versions of the extended body Ford Aerostar van than on the back roads to the Benmillers Inn?

The concept was to drive the vans on any combination of superhighway, A-class road and country gravel road to get an idea of how four-wheel drive (4WD) can be applied to something as large as a seven-passenger van.

Other than the 4WD system, the big news is a change made to improve the ability of the van to haul or tow large loads.

It employs a bored-out version of the standard Ford 2.9 litre V6. According to Ford, at a full 4.0 litres, this is "the most powerful engine ever offered in a Ford compact truck."

The Aerostar is hardly "compact", filling out my driveway like the QE2 in drydock.

## Splits torque

Using a chain-drive transfer case, engine torque is normally split two-thirds to the rear and one-third to the front wheels.

If the road gets wet, slushy or slippery, or there is enough of a speed difference between the front and rear wheels, the computer in the transfer case automatically splits torque equally front and rear through an electromagnetic clutch. It's all quite ingenious and virtually unnoticeable.

It's produced for Ford by Dana Corporation. Ford wanted a system with no buttons or levers.

I am told the duration of the shift is 3.3 seconds. If and when that did occur, I never noticed it, which is a credit to the system.

On a muddy back road and on a steep incline with gravel strewn on the surface, there was some torque

## Motoring

JIM ROBINSON



hunting. But in the entire trip there and back this was the only time the 4WD system made itself known.

Ford reprogrammed its electronic four-speed automatic transmission to cope with torque changes and that took more doing than one may have thought.

To make it all work, Ford notes, "there is a communications data link incorporated in the engine, allowing engine function to be monitored through a computerized diagnostic system."

In other words, a computer tells the autobox not to panic if there is a sudden shunting back of power from the rear to the front.

Now, if that was not enough, the Aerostar can be obtained with anti-lock brakes, which our test vehicle had.

I always marvel when four-wheel drive, which relies on locking up differentials, can be made to work with ABS, which is designed to keep the wheels from locking up. But work it does, hauling down the hefty weight of an extended van smoothly during the usual panic on the 401.

Ford equipped a number of auto writers with the 1990 Eddie Bauer top-of-the-line version with all the bells and whistles (list price \$30,031), such as special upholstery on the seats, a trip computer and digital gauging.

According to another writer the Eddie Bauer trim package is \$10,000, a considerable amount.

Nevertheless, this option will be popular and is in keeping with the



With a big V6 powerplant and a supple suspension system this Ford van handles lane changes easily. And according to reviewer Jim Robinson, it's attractive enough to take to Roy Thomson Hall.

upscale market movement in the family van category.

A considerable hike back is the rear deck, which (thanks be) opens up on hydraulic struts as one piece, revealing a rubberized mesh net to hold down luggage and odds and ends.

## A beauty

I should add here that those invited to this preview included some Ford execs from Dearborn with the latest four-door version of the 1991 Explorer recreational truck.

What a beauty it is, and look for a test on this as soon as I can get my

hands on one. It will be available this June.

The Aerostar comes with a host of "extra value packages", allowing consumers to order options in bulk to reduce cost. In the Eddie Bauer Aerostar you have everything Dearborn can serve up. It even had separate heater controls for back-seat passengers.

For what is really a jumbo-sized family van, the extended Aerostar acquits itself surprisingly well. Unlike the wallowing ride and numb power steering feel found in first-generation vans, you do get a pretty

good sense of the road and how the wheels are handling turns.

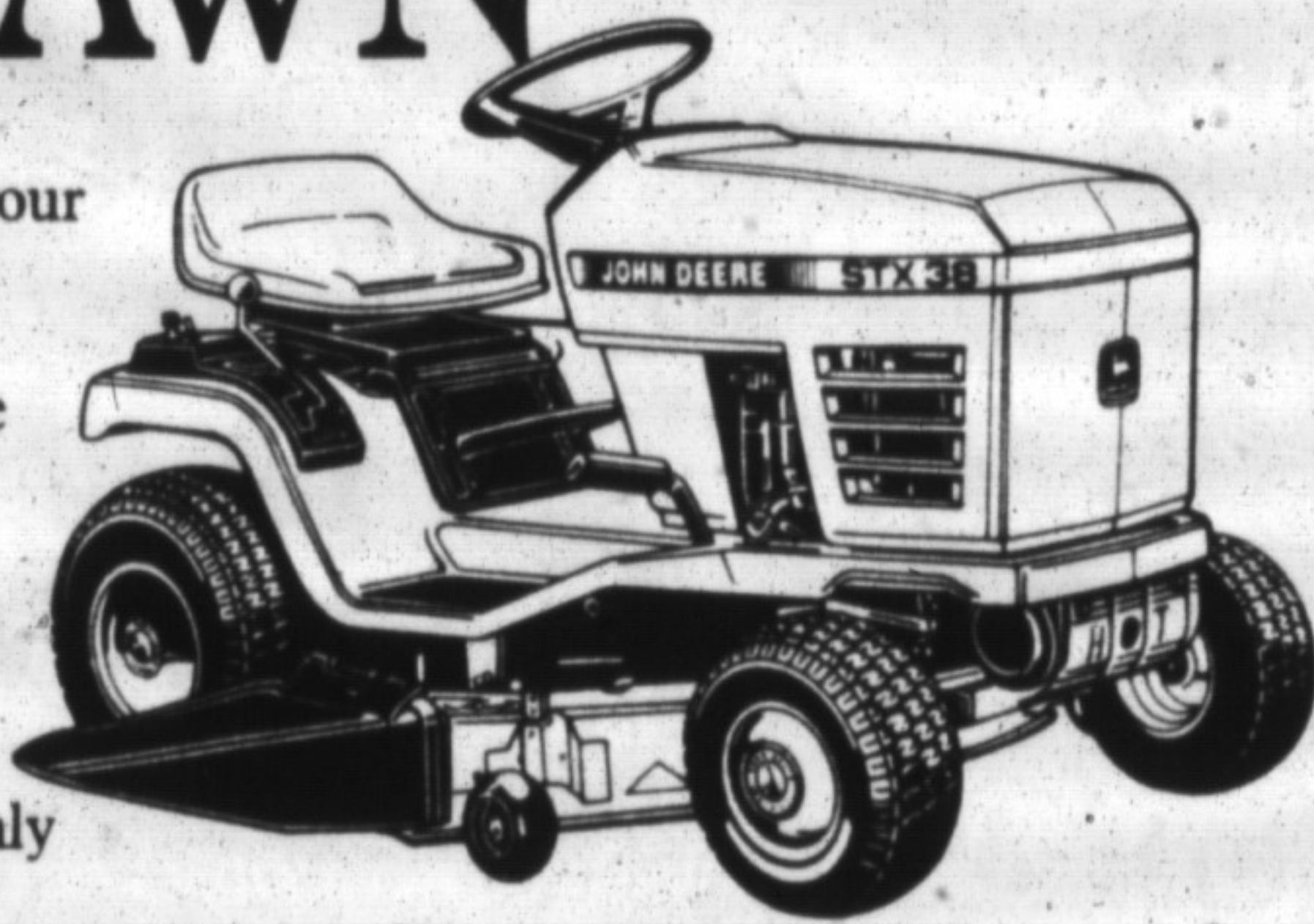
No, you can't nip and tuck, but you sure can make easy lane changes in a pinch thanks to the push from the big V6 and a remarkably supple suspension.

I should note that despite its length and girth, you do know where all four corners are, as opposed to some family vans on the market.

If you want big hauling power in an upscale family van you can take to Roy Thomson Hall, or the Benmillers, then Ford's extended version Aerostar is for you.

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## Theme for 1990-91

# Women battle environmental woes

The environment is still very much on the minds of more than 20,000 Women's Institute members in Ontario. They have taken as their theme for 1990-91 Women and the Environment — Family and Community. This continues their environmental themes of the past two years.

As both a fundraiser for centennial Women's Institute celebrations in 1997 and a method of encouraging recycling and waste control, institutes are selling carry-all bags to be used in grocery shopping as a replacement for conventional plastic bags.

In 1988 Ontario women's institutes set a target of 100 environmental projects to be underway by 1990. To date the number is 160 and growing.

In related community action, Ontario women's institutes, in conjunction with the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada, have just completed a nation-wide survey on the child care needs of rural residents. When the results have been compiled they will be presented to federal agricultural and health authorities.

## OFAH warns of danger if timber hearings ignored

One of the most significant news stories of the 1990s is threatening to become a non-story, says a spokesman for the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters.

The environmental assessment hearing into timber management, which will decide the future of Ontario's forests, has gone all but unnoticed by most of the province's media, said Dr. Terry Quinney, provincial fish and wildlife coordinator for OFAH.

But if approved the proposals will form a blueprint for all future logging activities in the province.

The industry will no longer have to undergo individual environmental assessments for each timber project.

"The implications are immense," Dr. Quinney said recently. "As much as 70 per cent of the province's map will be affected."

"Most members of the public have no idea these hearings have gone on for about two years and will continue for at least another 18 months," he said.

"And more important, they don't know that the future of the province's forests (is) being decided, largely without their input."

OFAH is one of a number of

groups opposing the provincial Ministry of Natural Resources' proposed timber policy.

The Ministry has emphasized only industry concerns related to timber management, said Dr. Quinney, virtually ignoring many complex factors associated with forests.

Dr. Quinney said he expects MNR to adopt several of the Federation's key recommendations, including: a habitat supply analysis, a study of social and economic factors in current timber management, an analysis of both the effects of logging on significant wildlife species and the cumulative impact of logging on forests.

Later this year the environmental assessment board will stage a series of travelling public hearings.

Dr. Quinney said it's essential those concerned attend and submit their views.

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters has maintained the most significant presence of all hearing attendants, according to an OFAH press release.

OFAH bills itself as the province's largest conservation organization, with 73,000 members.