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Spartan Motors Introduces New Mid-Engine RV Platform Me2 Platform Offers More Living & Storage Space, Greater Design Flexibility, Improved Performance

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LOUISVILLE, Ky., Nov. 29 /PRNewswire/ -- What could be better than taking your home with you on vacation?

Taking one with an attached garage.

Custom chassis manufacturer Spartan Motors, Inc. (NASDAQ:SPAR)

will unveil the "Me2," a new mid-engine platform that will allow motorhome manufacturers to offer a built-in "garage" where consumers can carry canoes, bicycles, ATVs and other "toys" today during the recreational vehicle industry's largest trade show.

The Charlotte, Mich.-based manufacturer of custom chassis and emergency vehicles will introduce its Me2 chassis at the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) national show this week in Louisville, Ky. Spartan Motors will unveil its new platform, which offers more living and storage space, during a press conference at 2:15 p.m. at the Spartan booth (6216).

The Company designed the "Me2," its new mid-engine platform, in response to consumer demand for more usable space in Class A coaches. Placing the engine and transmission in the middle of the coach will allow original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) greater design flexibility to build motorhomes that offer improved ride and handling, greater storage space and more room for slideouts. Specifically, the Me2:

- * Is three times stronger than a conventional chassis.
- * Can handle up to six slideouts, increasing the average living space in a coach by as much as 40 percent.
- * Allows for more innovative interior designs, including a sunken master bedroom with Jacuzzi, a computer room or traveling home office, etc.
- * Features a rear-lift deck that increases storage space by as much as 30 percent, allowing RVers to carry a small boat, canoes, six bicycles, eBikes, ATVs or whatever "toys" they might want on trips. Last year, U.S. consumers purchased more than 4.2 million "toys" to supplement their recreational activities.
- * Offers improved safety, easier maintenance, a quieter ride and other features.

"Spartan Motors' new Me2 chassis is really a first-of-its-kind in the industry," said John Szykiel, president and chief operating office of Spartan Motors. "The Me2 platform represents a quantum leap in chassis design and engineering that should help drive sales of Class A motorhomes, just as the introduction of slideouts did. The new platform is tailored specifically for Baby Boomers and others who are looking to maximize the enjoyment they can pack into their leisure time.

"As a culture, we are in love with leisure like never before -- and our spending habits show it. Rather than trying to 'get away from it all,' we're trying to take it all with us on our vacations. That's possible now with a motorhome built on our new Me2 platform, which allows RVers to bring bikes, canoes, ATVs and other 'toys' along on their vacations."

In designing a mid-engine coach, Spartan engineers moved the engine and transmission to the middle of the platform, below the floor and just ahead of the rear axle. Szykiel said this shift makes the engine and transmission "virtually disappear," which allows for a quieter ride. Shifting the center of gravity to the middle of the coach also improves safety, ride and handling.

The Me2 also makes maintenance simpler. Moving the engine, transmission and radiator away from the rear wheels reduces the amount of dirt and grime that gets kicked up. This new positioning improves airflow and reduces repairs caused by excess dirt and dust.

"Improving safety and performance remains a primary concern in every product Spartan Motors manufactures," Szykiel said. "The Me2 chassis scores well in both these categories, making it a wonderful platform for OEMs and their end users.

"Retail registration of diesel motorhomes has been strong for the first nine months of 2000, rising 23.1 percent during the third quarter alone. This demonstrates there is strong retail demand for diesel coaches. Given the order rates we have seen so far in the fourth quarter, we feel the inventory correction is behind us. We feel good about our sales prospects in 2001."

The engine configuration in the Me2 will open up additional living and storage space in coaches designed on the new platform. OEMs will be able to be more creative with their interior layouts, incorporating as many as six slideouts. They can also include innovative living quarters into their floor plans, such as a sunken master bedroom with a Jacuzzi, a (motor)home office, deluxe kitchen, an art studio or whatever the imagination dreams up.

Key to increasing storage capacity is a specially designed platform at the rear of the coach that raises and lowers hydraulically. This area, which has the capacity to hold up to 3,000 pounds, increases storage space up to 30 percent by offering 190 cubic feet of storage. Families will be able to stow their leisure vehicles inside the coach, which frees them up to tow a car behind their motorhome.

"The Me2 chassis gives OEMs the chance to dramatically differentiate their coaches through distinctive new floor plans," said Roger Burrows, Spartan Motors vice president of sales and marketing. "In essence, our new rear lift deck creates a garage that motorhome owners can take with them wherever they travel and carry whatever they like.

"Vehicles built on this new platform will appeal to discriminating Baby Boomers and other consumers who are looking to get the maximum usable space -- and the maximum value -- for their money. We are far ahead of our competition in bringing this innovative new concept to market."

Spartan expects to begin shipping prototypes of the Me2 in early March for mid-summer 2001 production. The mid-engine concept and rear lift deck are all in the patent process. More information on the Me2 platform is available at <https://theshyftgroup.com/>.

Spartan Motors, Inc. (<https://theshyftgroup.com/>) is a leading developer and manufacturer of custom chassis for recreational vehicles, fire trucks, ambulances and other specialty vehicles. The Company also owns fire and rescue vehicle manufacturers Luverne Fire Apparatus, Quality Manufacturing and Road Rescue, Inc.

The statements contained in this news release include certain predictions and projections that may be considered forward-looking statements by the securities laws. These statements involve a number of risks and uncertainties, including but not limited to economic, competitive, governmental and technological factors affecting the Company's operations, markets, products, services and prices, and actual results may differ materially.

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