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Spartan Motors Introduces Summit Series Motorhome Chassis Creates New Market Niche For Rear-Engine Diesels

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LOUISVILLE, Ky., Dec. 1 /PRNewswire/ -- Custom chassis maker Spartan Motors, Inc. (NASDAQ:SPAR) is unveiling the RV market's only entry-level, rear-engine diesel chassis at the industry's biggest trade show this week.

The Charlotte, Mich.-based manufacturer will introduce a three-platform line of diesel-powered chassis at the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) national show, which begins today in Louisville. The new line, called the Summit series, extends the overall diesel-pusher niche to entry-level products and gives Spartan Motors the widest range of diesel-powered chassis in the market.

"We designed the Summit series to bridge the gap between premium diesel pushers and the gas-powered market," Spartan Motors President and Chief Operating Officer John Szykiel said. "Spartan Motors invested more than two years of engineering and development in the Summit series because we believe it can be a revolutionary product for the motorhome market, as well as the simple fact that no one else in the industry is offering RV customers a viable entry-level diesel alternative at an attractive cost."

Spartan Motors' new chassis series includes three models -- the Summit 1000, Summit 2000 and Summit GT -- ranging in gross vehicle weight (GVW) from 19,000 to 24,500 pounds and 215 to 275 horsepower. Due to the chassis' advanced engineering, the 215 h.p. Summit 1000 in a 20,000-pound motorhome can accelerate faster from zero to 60 m.p.h. than a 330 h.p. chassis in a 29,000-pound motorhome, and the Summit will cost approximately 30% less.

"The Summit series rounds out Spartan's RV chassis offering and gives us the opportunity to grow further into our customers' product mix," Szykiel said. "We are very excited about partnering with our OEM customers to establish a new and successful niche in the motorhome market."

According to the RVIA, rear-engine diesel chassis as a percentage of the overall Class "A" motorhome market are on pace to grow more than 20% in 1998. The growth in this segment should be bolstered by General Motors Corporation's recently announced decision to exit the entry-level front-engine gas RV chassis business, leaving Ford Motor Company as the only well-recognized supplier to this market.

"As GM motorhome customers change or upgrade their vehicles, the Summit series offers them access to the performance and quality benefits of a rear-engine diesel," said Roger Burrows, Spartan Motors Vice President of Sales and Marketing. "We believe the new Summit series gives Spartan and our OEM partners the opportunity to gain a substantial share of the Class A entry-level RV market and continue the momentum toward diesel pushers."

Currently, a majority of diesel pusher chassis are on 36-foot RVs and longer. The Summit series is ideal for the 28- to 36-foot segment of the marketplace, which is presently dominated by gas-powered motorhomes. The Summit series offers RVers the chance to upgrade to the benefits of superior engine performance and ride and handling of a diesel pusher at only a modest increase in price.

Spartan Motors said the Summit series chassis will be available for production at the beginning of 1999. Spartan expects the Summit chassis will have an immediate presence when RV OEMs launch their model year 2000 lines in the summer of 1999.

Spartan's Summit series is a one-of-a-kind entry-level diesel pusher, and includes the following performance characteristics:

* Rear-engine diesel power. Diesel-powered chassis offer RV owners up to 50% better fuel economy, increased torque compared with their gas-powered equivalents, as well as sustained horsepower at altitude. Rear-engine chassis minimize engine noise, and resale values on diesel motorhomes are typically higher due to the longer life cycles of their engines and transferable warranties. The Summit's entry-level package provides RVers the benefits of rear-engine diesel power at only a modest increase in price.

* Electronic engine and transmission. The Summit series includes the new Cummins electronic ISB 5.9 liter diesel engine, bringing the performance and ride characteristics of larger Class A vehicles to the entry-level motorhome buyer. The Summit series also comes standard with the new Allison T-1000 or popular MD3060 electronic transmission that includes a five or six speed automatic and overdrive.

* Full air suspension. Ride and handling are dramatically improved with air suspension, versus the rigid spring suspensions on most entry-level gas powered chassis. This is one of the many significant advantages of a Spartan diesel pusher chassis and is a key benefit to attract buyers up to the Summit series.

* Anti-lock brakes. The Summit series chassis come standard with anti- lock brakes, as well as the optional engine exhaust brake -- a feature unavailable on gas powered chassis -- for optimal safety and lower maintenance costs.

* Heavy-duty frame rail construction. The Summit, as with all Spartan chassis, is engineered with steel frame rail construction that is fully integrated with the motorhome coach for maximum stability and durability. The Summit is also available in a raised-frame design to accommodate the popular slideout options.

Spartan Motors, Inc. (<http://theshyftgroup.com/>) is a leading developer and manufacturer of custom chassis for recreational vehicles, as well as fire trucks, transit buses, tour buses, school buses and other specialty vehicles. Spartan also owns three companies that manufacture fire-and-rescue vehicles: Luverne Fire Apparatus, Quality Manufacturing and Road Rescue, Inc., as well as a majority stake in Carpenter Industries, Inc., which manufactures school bus bodies.

Source: Spartan Motors, Inc.

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