

The Whole Earth Bookmobile: An Alternative to Gerstenslager

by John Barrow

Northwestern Regional Library

If your library needs a new bookmobile and your heart sinks at the thought of buying and maintaining one, a converted van might be the thing you are looking for. The first recorded van-bookmobile was produced by Walter Johnston of the Coastal Plain Regional Library in Tifton, Georgia. The Northwestern Regional Library in Elkin, North Carolina currently has two vans in operation and is quite pleased with them.

To make your own van-bookmobile purchase a $\frac{3}{4}$ ton van (Chevrolet, Dodge, or Ford) equipped with truck-size tires and driver's seat only. You must then have the roof converted and the interior finished. This was done for the Northwestern Regional Library by Southeastern Turtletop, Inc. of Winston-Salem. The converter will cut out the existing roof and install an insulated vinyl roof which allows 6'2" headroom. He then insulates and panels the walls, lays a vinyl floor (carpet is available), and will install a desk and swivel seat. Then find a local cabinet-maker who can build the shelves to your specifications (ideally they should be adjustable and angled at 12 degrees). Have

the outside lettering painted and you've got a bookmobile. Time elapsed is about six weeks or less.

The entire cost of a finished van for the Northwestern Region in 1972 was under \$5700. The price mentioned included van, roof, paneling, shelving, and air conditioning. The van has space for 1000 books, and there is a roomy storage area over the driver's seat.

Approximate costs in 1972:

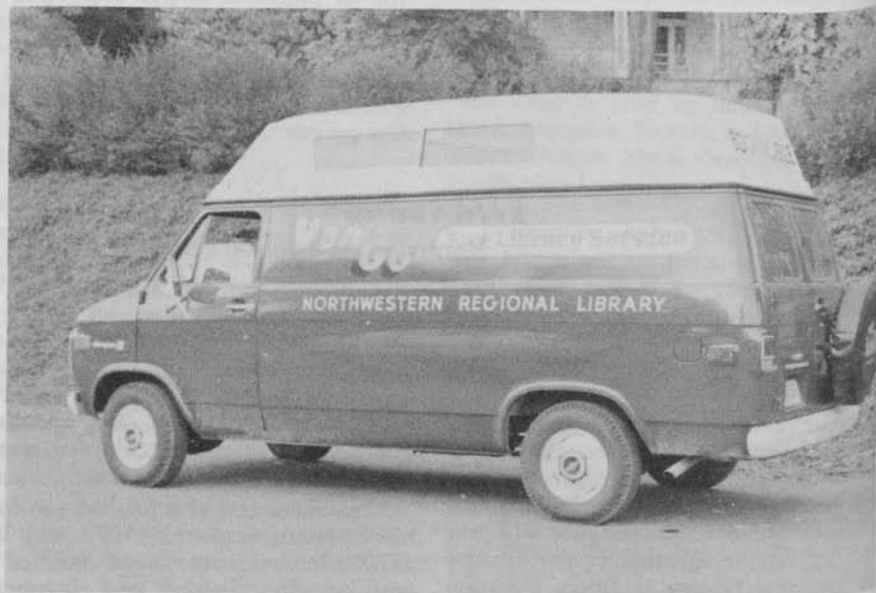
$\frac{3}{4}$ ton Chevy Van	---	\$3150
Tires	-----	110
Turtletop roof	-----	830
Paneling, insulation		
floor, desk, etc.	---	800
Shelving	-----	300
Air conditioning	---	400
Lettering	-----	85

A van has some advantages over the traditional bookmobile. Its initial cost is low and it is inexpensive to maintain. It is easy to handle and has good visibility, so that one person can operate it. Interior and exterior decoration are limited only by your imagination (the North-

western's first van is lettered in day-glo colors). Its size and styling are appealing rather than institutional (it doesn't look like a bread truck, milk truck, or mobile crime lab), and it has great resale value.

There are some disadvantages: the drivers may not like it ("it doesn't look like a bookmobile"), though most of those at the Northwestern Region like it very much. It holds only 1000 books (but as one li-

brarian says, how many 818's and Gothic romances do you need?). The person working on it will need to be fairly agile or may otherwise feel cramped by its compact arrangement. The floor space is definitely smaller, although seven users have been observed on it at one time. A van may not cure your outreach blues, but it will do considerably less violence to your budget.



**Northwestern Regional Library
Van-Bookmobile**

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