

The 1978 Midnite Express Truck

Over the last few years, I have heard about every story you could possibly hear about the Midnite Express, (usually spelled incorrectly---Midnight Express, look at the door decal).

First let me say, the most important item in this article is the fact that not one of the Midnite Express trucks was built at any Dodge truck production factory. Another falsehood that has been circulating on the internet for years is that they only made 200 of these trucks. Just another fact that cannot be verified and not true.

Without a doubt, there are more "Clones" built than the total of original dealer-built trucks. I have seen 1977, 1978, 1979 and even 1980 Midnite Express trucks, no doubt, all of them were built by private owners, not dealer-built trucks, on the '77, '79 and '80 models. I have even seen a 4X4 Midnite!!

They were all '78 models and most were supposedly built at Mr. Norm's, Grand Spaulding Dodge, in Chicago. They were sent all over the U.S. to Dodge dealers wanting to have one or more to retail. Because they were all built by a Dodge dealer, there are no production numbers available. Unfortunately, there are no designators in the VIN to designate it as a Midnite Express, as there are designators in the VIN for a Li'l Red Express Truck.

Back in late '77, the Dodge Truck Division gave their blessing to a few select Dodge dealers, to modify a standard D150 Dodge 6' Utiline bed, painted Black Sunfire Metallic, with a 440 engine, into a Midnite Express truck. The special Li'l Red Express parts, stacks, steps, wood sideboards and special decals, were ordered through the dealer's spare parts departments and installed on these trucks. It is not known for sure, but it is a definite possibility that all the dealer converted Midnite trucks were equipped with the 440ci engine and 727 automatic transmissions, and they all had the black bucket seat option.

One of the main reasons they were only built in '78, it was the last year that the 440 was going to be produced by Dodge, for pickup trucks. Therefore, this is why the Li'l Red Express got the high performance 360, because the standard 360, (5.9) was an engine that was going to continue to be produced in future production trucks.

The only article I have ever read about the Midnite Express truck was published in the September 1996 issue of Mopar Collector's Guide. Pics below are from that issue of the magazine. Come to find out, the truck is a mid-year 1977 truck, with '79 taillights and '79 bed, with no side marker lights, that was on all '78 Dodge trucks. It also has the 1977 Utiline bed backup lights below the tailgate and backup lights in the '79 taillights. The truck also has headrests on the seats and a varnished Oak bed floor, neither of which was standard on any '78 Dodge truck. So, even though this is supposedly a "Real" Midnite truck, it is not what the actual '78 Midnite Express trucks were supposed to be equipped like. Come to find out, the current owner purchased this truck in California, so there is no telling what was done to it after it left Grand Spaulding Dodge in Chicago, if it was ever there in the first place. Documents such as delivery sheets, work orders, sales contracts, etc. can be falsified. So, the truth will never be known. There is no information about the actual production numbers, even though the internet is loaded with claims that only 200 were ever built. Because there was supposedly a fire at Grand Spaulding Dodge and all the records were destroyed, conveniently there are no records on this truck. So, it will never be known how many of these trucks were converted into the Midnite Express. Even if Grand Spaulding Dodge had kept track of the exact number of trucks built, nobody will ever know for sure, now. Everybody wants something special, and because of this, the Midnite Express legend lingers on and on, thanks to the internet. Everyone knows, weight slows you down, so in essence, they really were not anything that special, and not built at a Dodge factory. The standard 440-truck engine did have more

horsepower and torque, than the High Performance 360, but the extra weight of the big block off set any great speed difference, between it and the light weight, small block Modified Special Police 360, used in the Li'l Red.

The Midnite is in the same category as the Yenko and Motion Performance Camaro. They were all just dealer converted vehicles. That does not mean they are not special, but without any paperwork from Grand Spalding Dodge or any other Dodge dealer, you have no way to prove that it is not a homebuilt clone. Of course, if you have a '77, '79 or '80 Midnite, it is a clone, without a doubt.

Hopefully, this clears up some of the myths about these trucks.

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Mopar Collectors Guide magazine photo, September 1996



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