

Facts about the Midnite Express Truck
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VIN: D13BD7S230671

First: Midnite Express Trucks, were supposedly built by Dodge Dealers, not the factory. **TRUE**

Second: They were “late production”, 1978 Conventional Cab trucks, with the 6’ Utiline Bed. **TRUE**

Third: All were all painted PX8 / PY 4009 Sunfire Black Metallic, **TRUE**

Fourth: They all had the 440ci. Engine with a 4bbl Thermoquad carb., and a 727, 3 speed automatic transmission. **TRUE**

Fifth: They all had the black bucket seat option. **TRUE**

Now, let’s decode this trucks VIN number:

D – 2 WD

1 – ½ Ton, Conventional Cab

3 – 6’ Utiline bed, wheelbase 115”

B – 6000# to 10,000# GVW

D – 440ci engine with 4bbl carb.

7 – Year produced, **1977**

S – Warren Truck Plant #1, Detroit, MI

230671 – Factory Sequence number, built in late **May** or early **June 1977**

NOTE: This truck was built approximately 10 months before the Lil’ Reds even went into production. So how did Mr. Norm acquire the Lil’ Red parts for it, that had not even been produced at that time?

As you can see, there are some major discrepancies, by comparing this information, as to how a Midnite Express truck was supposed to be. Looking at the pics and info from this magazine of this truck, you will find these important discrepancies.

First: The truck is a **1977** truck, not a late production 1978 truck (noted in the article, and by the 1977 VIN)

Second: It has a **1979** Utiline bed, (no side marker lights on the bed, which all 1977 & 1978 Utiline beds had.

Third: It has **1979** taillights, with built-in side marker lights and backup lights.

Fourth: It has the round **1977** backup lights below the tailgate, which was last used on 1977 Utiline beds. (now it has 2 sets of backup lights, 1977 & 1979)

Fifth: It has a varnished Oak bed floor, with chrome skid strips (all Utilines had a pine floor and skid strips, painted the color of the truck.

Sixth: It has black headrests on the seats, (There was no headrest option in any Dodge truck at this time).

Seventh: The truck was built at the Warren Truck Plant #1, Detroit, MI, indicated by the "S" in the 7th digit of the VIN, all Li'l Red Express trucks were built at the Tecumseh Road Truck Plant in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, a "J" in the 7th digit.

Supposedly this truck was built as a "Midnite" and then sold at Grand-Spaulding Dodge in Chicago in late 1978, but was restored and re-sold in Van Nuys, California, in the 1990's.

As of this writing, no one has been able to explain any of these discrepancies, they just ignore the "facts" and continue with the "STORY".

My Synopsis of What Happened

I'm sure the first owner and the current owner are nice guys and believed the story themselves. I think the first owner was the one that took the bait,

and person he sold it to, also believed the story he was told when he bought the truck from the first guy.

The second owner told me himself that the truck was redone in the '90's. I think that's when this truck became a "Midnite". From knowing that it was restored in the '90's, plus all the discrepancies on the truck, anybody versed in Dodge trucks should be able to see, that this was a pure hoax. I'm not saying that either owner knew what had happened, they just took the word of the guy selling it, but like I've said before, "buyer beware", facts are facts.

Here's what I think happened during the '90's restoration, they had a rough '77 Dodge Utiline bed truck with a 440, with probably a really rusted bed. It wasn't hard to make the truck a "Midnite", they just didn't realize that there were differences in the beds, i.e. side marker lights & taillights. They had a nice '79 bed, so they just painted it black and installed a varnished oak floor (which also wasn't standard) and put it on the '77 truck. They probably still had the '77 bed, with the under-tailgate backup lights, so, not knowing better, they just transferred the lights to the new bed. That location was never used on any truck after '77, but they didn't know that. So, by using the '79 bed & taillights, they ended up having 2 sets of backup lights and no side marker bracket and light, which all '77 & '78 trucks had.

By the time they built this truck, the elusive "Midnite" story, was already a fantastic story that had been floating around for some time, and the opportunity to copy it would have been very tempting, and all the parts were readily available. It was an ideal opportunity to at least double or triple their profit, as opposed to just selling a restored 440 truck.

The original person doing the restoration work knew that a "Midnite" would bring a bunch more money, than a restored standard truck, so why not just make it a "Midnite", and make up a real interesting story to go along with it? The cost of the restoration wouldn't have been that much more expensive. The truck already had the paperwork, showing that it was originally sold at Grand-Spaulding Dodge. What a "perfect storm", very similar to the now famous "Black Ghost", Challenger story, another hoax perpetrated on the public!

I have no idea where the headrests came from, but that type of headrest was a popular option back then, and available in the aftermarket. I even put a set on a '65 Corsair I owned. They were not available from Dodge!

Where I have the problem is people making up stories, just to fleece unsuspecting buyers, that may not know what the real thing should be like. I'm positive that this is what happened with this truck.

The original buyer was so enamored by the truck's beauty and the fact that it was sold at Mr. Norms just added credit to the false story.

Again, I don't think either owner was, or is aware of any of any of this synopsis, but I do think I'm right. It's everybody's dream, to have something special, and I really believe that this is what happened.

As of this date, I have never seen a "Real" Midnite Express, built and documented by a Dodge dealer. There are hundreds of clones out there, built on trucks ranging from 1977 to 1984, I personally know of 3 Lil Reds that were built from a real Lil Red Express truck. These trucks are as real as any supposed dealer-built truck, none of them were built by Dodge.

John C. Roberts

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