

## **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 were built at any Dodge truck production factory.

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 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, 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, 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. Notice, this truck has '79 taillights and no bed side marker lights and has the 1977 Warlock backup lights below the tailgate. So, even this is supposedly a "Real" Midnite truck, it is not what the actual '78 Midnite Express trucks were supposed to be equipped like. A '78 Dodge truck had the side marker lights on the bed side and backup lights in the top of each taillight.

There is no information about the actual production numbers, because there was a fire at Grand Spalding Dodge and all the records were supposedly destroyed. So, it will never be known how many of these trucks were converted to the Midnite Express truck, even if Grand Spalding Dodge had kept track of the exact number of trucks built, nobody will ever know for sure.

Everybody wants something special, and this fact has caused the myth of the Midnite Express to linger on.

However, the extra weight of the 440 big blocks, rendered the truck to not being much, or any faster than the high performance 360 police engine small block, used in the Li'l Red Express.

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 standard 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 we're 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 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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