

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 a 1980 Midnite Express trucks, no doubt, all of them were built by private owners, not dealer-built trucks, definitely 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.

Back in late '77, the Dodge Truck Division, gave their blessing to select Dodge dealers, that wanted to modify the Dodge Warlock into a Midnite Express. The special Li'l Red Express parts, stacks, wood sideboards and decals, were ordered through the dealer's spare parts departments and installed on a Warlock.

Even if the Warlocks were painted black, the trucks were stripped and repainted in a metallic gold, black paint. It is not known for sure, but it is a definite possibility that all the dealer converted Warlock trucks were equipped with the 440ci engine and 727 automatic transmission. Of course, being that they were Warlocks, they all had the black bucket seat option.

One of the main reasons they were only built in '78 was, it was the last year that the 440 was going to be produced by Dodge. That 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 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 supposed "Real" Midnite truck is not correct.

There is no information about the actual production numbers, because there was a fire at Grand Spalding Dodge and all the records were destroyed. So, it will never be known how many of the Warlocks were converted to the Midnite Express truck, even if Grand Spalding Dodge had kept track of the exact number of trucks built and nobody knows if they did or didn't.

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. 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 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 are 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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