

Double Clutch



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Ryan Wichtner's 1986 Marmon P57



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Around the world at 30 Miles Per Hour: The FBW Project

by Jeff Lakaszcyk,
Photos from the author, Estelle Ohanian, and Dan Wilhelm.

What vehicle would you choose to tour the world in? The choices seem endless, from luxury motorhomes, RV's, campers, or perhaps even a minivan. But an antique Swiss army truck with a top speed of 32 miles per hour would probably not be high on your list. However Estelle Ohanian and Dan Wilhelm, an adventurous couple from France, are blessed with a youthful enthusiasm and are not afraid of a challenge. They are in the first year of a three and a half year world tour in "Woody", their 1957 FBW AX40 Swiss Army truck, and spent a few days at the ATCA Winter National show in January.

Estelle, an agri-food science engineer, and Dan, a team manager in the food industry, had been planning their around the world tour for several years. Before meeting Dan, Estelle had dreamed of taking a backpacking trip around the world. Estelle, from Paris, and Dan, from Alsace, met in 2016 when they both worked at the Mondelez Chocolate factory in Strasbourg, France. However, they did not become a couple until 2018, because in Estelle's words, "before

that we couldn't stand each other". They soon decided to spend their lives together. After many discussions with Dan, Estelle's long range plan to tour the world by backpack evolved into a world tour with Dan in a motorized camper. In 2019, after Estelle's engineering studies were complete, she embarked on a year long tour of Australia in a small Ford Econovan, nick named "Take A Risk". She learned a lot about what van life was about.

Attempting a world tour in a vehicle would be much more expensive than backpacking, so Estelle and Dan began planning on how to raise the necessary funds. Careful research was done, and all costs were over estimated to provide an emergency cushion. Diesel fuel, food, and deposit insurance were the biggest costs. Deposit insurance is purchased to ensure the truck can enter all countries, and be repatriated to France in case of problems. Other expenses were visas, travel insurance, truck insurance, telephone/internet, ferry, activities, and security savings. The total of all these



Estelle's Econovan in Australia.

was over \$129,000. There was also money required for the truck, which we will get to later.

Estelle and Dan's plan to raise money required them to move from France to Switzerland. Switzerland is a very affluent country, with many good paying jobs. Estelle and Dan both found jobs there, and in three years they were able to save all the funds required for their around the world trip. In addition, they solicited several corporate and individual sponsors to help offset the costs for their volunteering efforts.

It was during Estelle's Australian adventure that the couple acquired Woody. In October of 2019 Dan had joined Estelle in Australia for a few weeks. They had previously been discussing what type of vehicle they should get for their future world tour. They knew they wanted something larger than Estelle's Australian Ford Econovan, and as they both had an interest in antique vehicles, they also wanted something older. Quite by coincidence, a friend back in France who collected buses



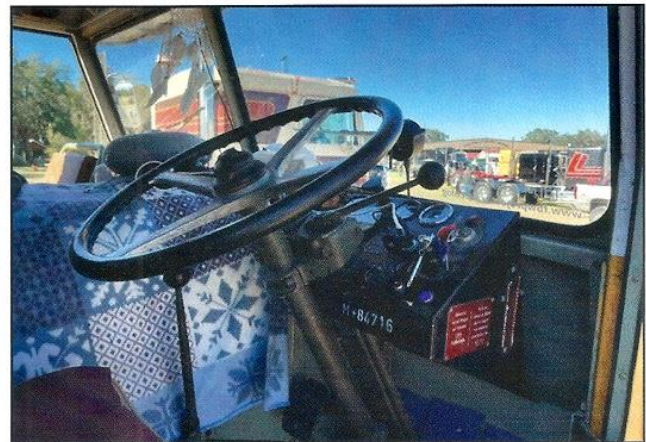
The wooden framework can be seen in this factory image.



The 1957 FBW AX40 radio truck when first purchased.

called to tell them about a vehicle for sale on the French website "Leboncoin" that might suit their purposes. The truck was owned by a vehicle collector in the Swiss Alps who was retiring and selling his collection. Estelle and Dan had to move fast, as the truck was selling for a good price and several other buyers were interested. After a few phone calls, two days later Estelle and Dan were the proud owners of a 62 year old Swiss army truck, bought sight unseen! Fortunately the truck turned out to be in very good condition.

Their bus collecting friend was able to deliver the truck from the Alps to Alsace, a two day trip, but it would be almost two months before the couple would return from Australia and see the truck for the first time. What they had bought was a 1957 FBW AX40 radio van, a diesel powered four wheel drive truck. FBW, short for Franz Brozincevic and Co. Motorwagenfabrik Wetzikon AG, has a history in Switzerland that goes back to 1910, with the last FBW badged truck built in



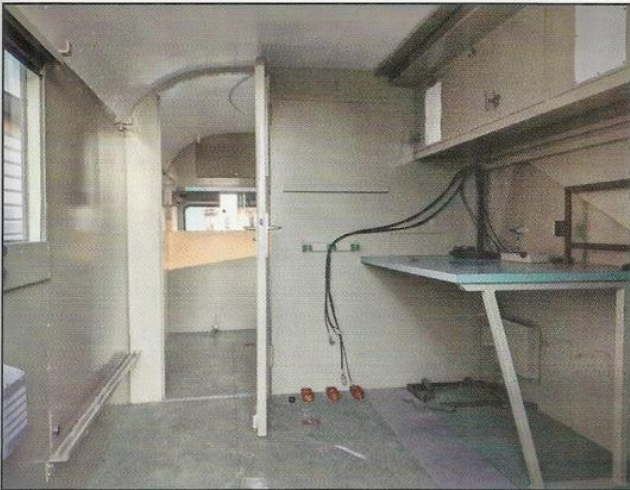
The steering wheel is on the right.

1985 after a merger with Saurer. The AX40 is equipped with an FBW 8.55 liter 6 cylinder diesel engine developing 110 horsepower. The engine is backed by a four speed transmission with a two speed transfer case and a differential lock on the rear axle. Brakes are hydraulic with an air assist, and the driver sits on the right hand side. The inside of the radio compartment is 16 feet long, eight feet wide and six feet tall, an ideal starting point for a camper. The entire rear body has a wooden framework, with the outer steel panels fastened over it. The AX40 radio truck is a very rare model, with less than twenty built.

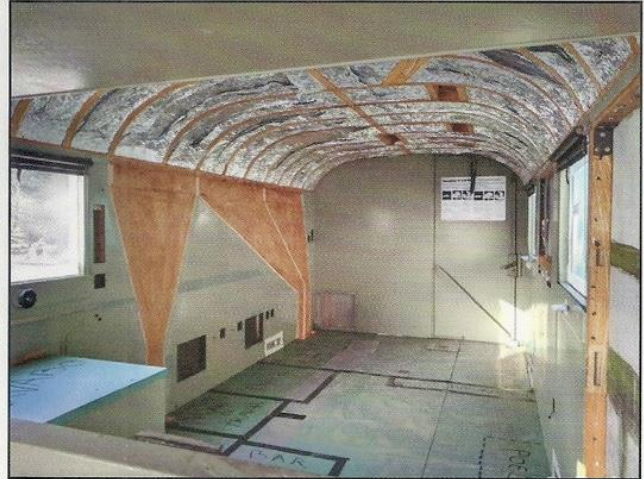
Now that they had the truck, the next step would be to plan its conversion to a world traveler. Once again the financials were carefully planned. The purchase price of

the truck was \$3000, renovations were \$7500, new solar panels and batteries were just under \$5000, and new tires were purchased for \$5400, for a total expenditure of about \$21,000. Now the fun began, which was to do all the work to make an over sixty year old truck reliable and convert it into a comfortable living space for a five year journey.

The renovations would start in early 2020 and last



The original interior when purchased.



The interior stripped out with new insulation going in.



3D imaging of the new living accommodations.



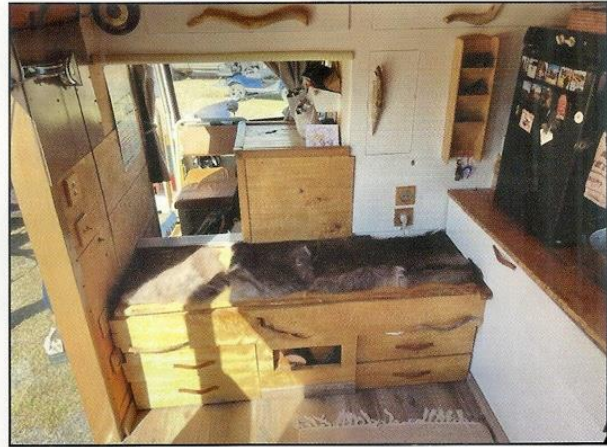
The bed being built in the rear of the truck.



The kitchen with "Le Bar", the wood stove, and the finished bed in the background.



The view as you step inside the door.



Looking to the front of the living area.

for three years, and would be delayed by two separate Covid lockdowns, lasting six and four months. Since the original radio compartment was separated into two rooms, the wall was removed and the interior completely gutted. Using the "Tiny House" concept for inspiration, Estelle and Dan planned the new interior. First the original space with exact dimensions was mapped out. Then several sketches were made of the proposed new layouts. When the plan was finalized, the new interior was modeled in 3D using a free software program called FloorPlanner. Next, the ceilings and walls were fully

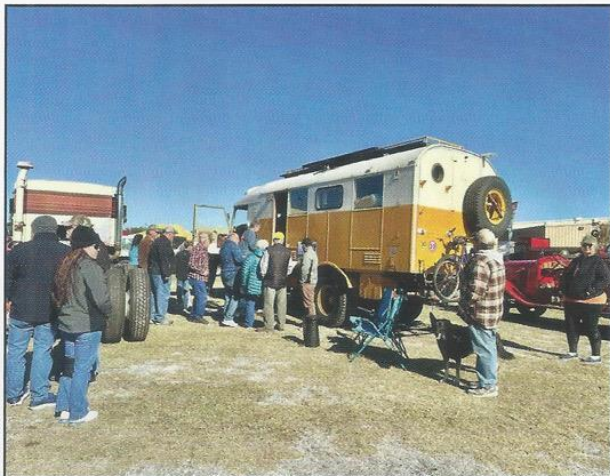
insulated. New electrical cables were installed and the walls were painted white. A natural raw fir wood ceiling from a local sawmill in Alsace was fitted. The floor was insulated and a floating parquet wood flooring was installed. The bed was created from raw poplar planks which were cut, planed, and sanded. A one step bench is made into the bed and contains three storage units. A bedside table at the end of the bed includes a space to store computers. A stainless steel shower with a ceramic pan and a mirror on the outside of the door is next to the bed.



Estelle and Dan relaxing inside of Woody.

The kitchen features a wooden countertop, a small gas refrigerator, a gas oven, a sink made from an old jam basin, and a 31 gallon water storage tank under the countertop. On the inside of the cabinet doors are unique storage pockets made from old blue jeans. A small 12 kilogram wood stove is located by the entrance. Finally, “Le Bar”, a small pivoting countertop is made from old pallets. All of the wood used on the entire conversion came from small Alsatian businesses.

Outside, the drab green military color had to go. More fun colors were required. Estelle and Dan separately decided on the colors they wanted, but it turned out they were both in agreement: orange/yellow and off white. The couple painted the truck themselves with help from professional painter Jean Wilhelm, Dan’s brother. As an added touch, an original nautical porthole was added to the rear door, as a tribute to Jules Verne. The porthole can be opened from the bed.



Estelle, Dan, and Woody drew quite a crowd at the Winter National show.



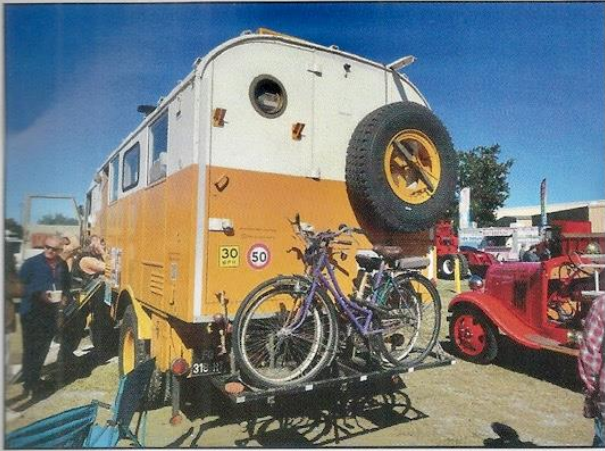
A map of Estelle and Dan’s “For a Better World” tour.

By September of 2022 the transformation of the old army truck was complete. Estelle and Dan held a “housewarming” party with forty to fifty guests. They set out a suggestion box for the guests to suggest a name for the truck. The name “Woody” caught their eye as so much of the truck’s construction was made from wood. Estelle is also a Disney fan and of course Woody is the cowboy in the movie “Toy Story”. So Woody was the perfect name, and now a Woody collectible toy from Disneyland Paris is attached to the back of the truck, just like in the movie.

Inspired by the letters in the name of their truck (FBW), the name of Estelle and Dan’s tour is “For a Better World” Project. Besides being tourists, Estelle and Dan plan to do humanitarian work and eco-volunteering in fourteen different countries, including marine mammal rehabilitation in California. Other efforts will include elephant conservation in Thailand, protection of pumas in Argentina, Amazon research and



Woody’s colors are very similar to Estelle’s Australian Econovan.



The back of the truck is busy with a spare tire, bicycles, and Woody from "Toy Story".

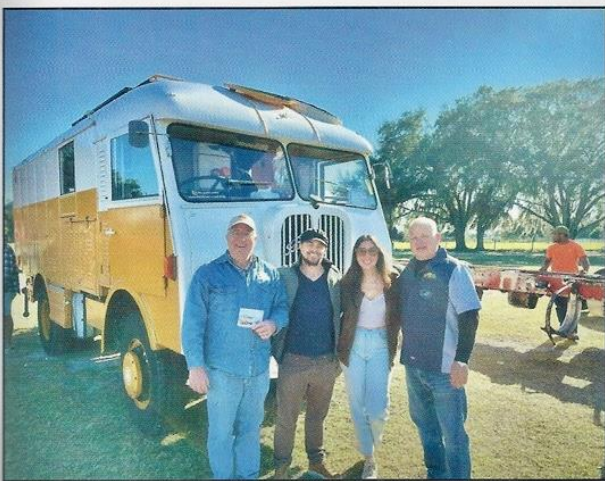
reforestation in Brazil, wildlife conservation in Kenya, and to aid children in disadvantaged environments in Vietnam. Estelle and Dan accept corporate sponsorships and individual donations to support their volunteer humanitarian efforts.

Their travels with Woody began in Alsace in June of 2023. Estelle and Dan spent the remainder of the year touring Northern Europe visiting seven countries, including Belgium, Holland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Norway. In early November they would load Woody on a ferry travelling from Gothenburg, Sweden, to Halifax, Nova Scotia. However, Estelle and Dan were not allowed to travel on the ferry, so they left Woody behind and flew to Montreal. While waiting for their truck to arrive from Europe they traveled to several cities in Canada by car and train, even taking a three night trip down to Boston. Finally they were reunited with their beloved Woody



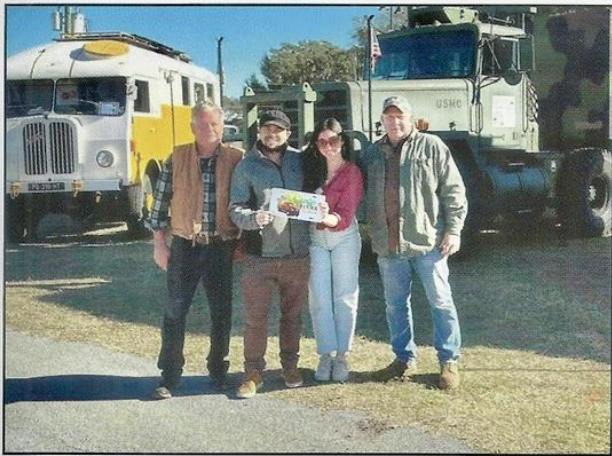
in Halifax on December 17, and began their trip south to the United States.

We caught up with Estelle and Dan at the ATCA Winter National show where they camped for two days. Since "Woody" is very likely the only FBW AX40 in the U.S. and a relatively unknown vehicle here, it received a lot of attention, and Estelle and Dan were warmly welcomed. They graciously answered everyone's questions, allowed tours of Woody's living space, and patiently explained the many features and how they designed and built them. They made a quite favorable impression on everyone who met them. Vintage Trucks of Florida members were so impressed that they created a "Long Distance" award, a VTOF license plate, and



Estelle and Dan received a "Long Distance" award, a VTOF license plate, from Paul Oates, left, and Jojo Dzilinski, right. They proudly displayed it as Estelle drove away from the show.

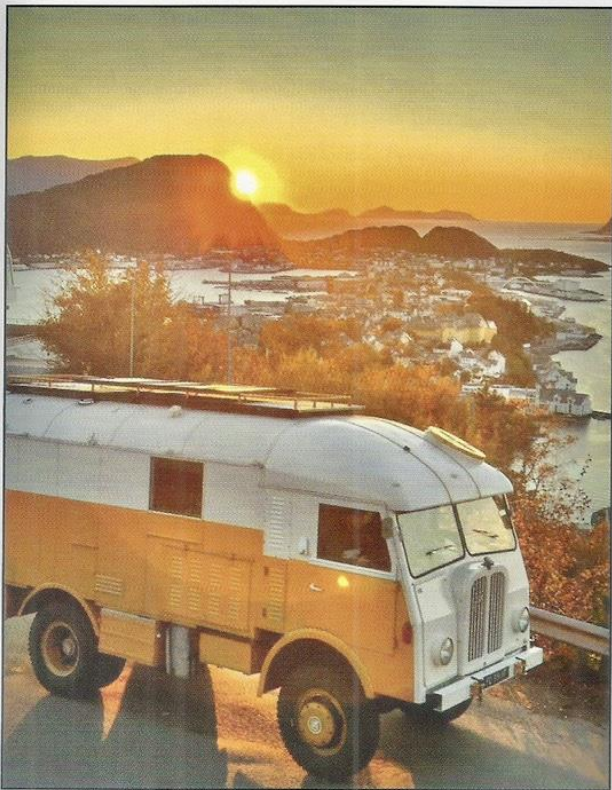




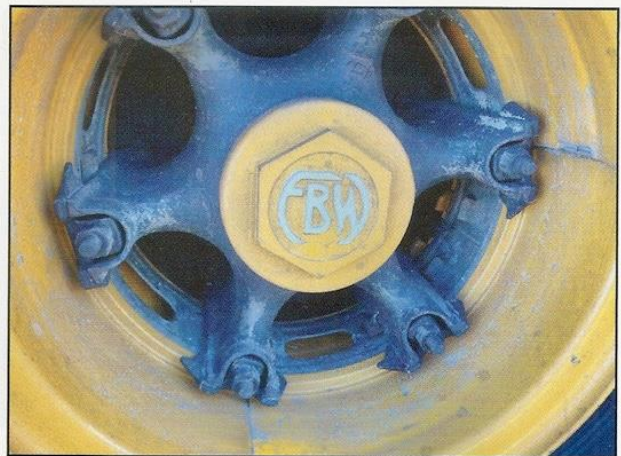
Andy Harwood, Dan, Estelle, and Ken Field.

presented it to Estelle and Dan during the raffle on Saturday.

Following the show Estelle and Dan attended the Daytona 24 hour race, went to Disney World, swam in several of Florida's famous fresh water springs, and travelled to Key West. Before leaving Florida, they stopped at Ken Field's place for some preventive maintenance on Woody. Estelle and Dan met Ken and his friend Andy Harwood, both former Army mechanics



A few scenes from Estelle, Dan, and Woody's adventures in Europe. Both photos were taken in Norway.



The "FBW" logo on the rear hub.

and current VTOF members, at the Winter National show. Ken and Andy helped Estelle and Dan take care of several items, including rotating the tires, changing the oil and filters, servicing the front hubs, checking chassis oil levels and performing a full lubrication, repairing a brake, and fixing the spare wheel rim. With these items taken care of, Woody was rejuvenated and ready for the next part of the journey.

Leaving Florida, Estelle and Dan spent time in New Orleans and then Texas, before turning south to Mexico. When this article is published in May they will likely

