

# '97 cargo van going the distance: One million miles



## Timeline

**100,000:** While turning onto the loop to 15/23 off I-75 in Findlay, Ohio.

**200,000:** East bound on the Western Kentucky parkway in Kentucky while passing a rest area.

**300,000:** In front of the gaurd rail on US 24 heading east out of Waterville, Ohio.

**400,000:** Heading west on Rt 2 at the beginning of the Sandusky bay bridge in Sandusky, Ohio.

**500,000:** (2-20-03) On the Ohio turnpike heading west between the 27 and 26 mile markers.

**600,000:** (1-30-04) Southbound on I-65 at Park City, Kentucky.

**700,000:** (1-5-05) Northbound on I-75 at mile marker 11 in Cincinnati, Ohio.

**800,000:** (12-2-05) Northbound on I-65 at mile marker 76 in Upton, Kentucky.

**900,000:** (12-14-06) Northbound on I-30 in Arkansas at mile marker 22.

**1,000,000:** (2-03-08) Toledo, Ohio in Target parking lot with friends and family. 14 people counting me piled in my van for the last 1/2 mile. It was on Super Bowl Sunday. Giants vs. Patriots.

**By Larry P. Vellequette**  
**Blade Business Writer**

When your Grandma turns 100, she gets a cake with a forest of candles.

But as Doug Schell approaches a rare magic milestone 10,000 times as big, he just can't figure out how best to mark the occasion.

"I'm thinking of throwing it a party," Mr. Schell said last week as he was driving his 1997 Ford E-250 cargo van near Hamilton, Ont. "But I don't know if that's too weird."

Sometime in the next few days, Mr. Schell's van - which he bought used in Monroe, Mich., in 1996 and uses to deliver cargo across North America - will have been driven 1 million miles.

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"When I bought it [for \$14,000], it had 40,000 miles on it," said Mr. Schell, 41, of Holland, Ohio. "It's a really good van. I can't complain at all."

He works as an expeditor for Toledo's Bolt Express, driving packages, auto parts, and even single envelopes from point-to-point across North America. "I drive between 80,000 and 100,000 miles a year. I'm always out on the road," he said.

His maintenance secrets for getting a million miles from his van would make most automotive engineers and



Doug Schell's short trip in Spring Meadows Shopping Center's parking lot in his Ford E-250 cargo van marked a long journey as his odometer flipped to all zeroes in his half-mile jaunt. (THE BLADE/ANDY MORRISON)

mechanics cringe: He changes his oil every 10,000 miles, but one time drove it 55,000 miles before an oil change. He adds a quart of oil with every other fill-up, however.

Doug Schell, a driver for Toledo's Bolt Express, hopes to get 100,000 more miles out of his van.

He's also gotten amazing durability out of some of his van's components. He had well over 900,000 miles on the odometer before he had to put in a new exhaust system, and he got 500,000 miles out of his first serpentine belt.

Mr. Schell's regular maintenance provider backs up his claims, with service records that date to the purchase of the vehicle.

"Our mechanics always love working on his van because they're always amazed at how many miles he's driven since he was last in," said Brent Gilley, owner of Mytee Automotive, on Holland-Sylvania Road south of Central Avenue. "He puts on more miles in a couple weeks than I put on in a year."

It wasn't that long ago that odometers on American-made vehicles only had five numbers, not including the tenths tumbler, and would show 00,000

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*"It's a really good van.  
I can't complain at all."  
~ Doug Schell*

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when a vehicle hit 100,000 miles.

But as quality has improved over the decades, so has the length of time and distance that consumers are keeping their vehicles, and the number of digits required to measure that distance.

"In all the years I've been at Ford, this is probably the highest-mileage E-Series I've ever heard about," said Jim Cain, a spokesman for Ford Motor Co. in Dearborn. The automaker hired a company to survey registration data across the United States a few years ago in a hunt for high-mileage cars and trucks, he said.

Assembled in Avon Lake, Ohio, the E-250 van is a heavy-duty vehicle based on the same design as the F-250 pickup, and has been the market leader in that vehicle segment for 28 straight years. Mr. Schell's van has an auto-

matic transmission and a 5.4-litre V-8 engine.

"The vans and trucks are overbuilt, if you will, because we know that people use them," Mr. Cain said.

Mr. Schell doesn't contend his van has been perfect. For example, he hasn't had a working air conditioner in more than five years, something that makes his cargo van "a huge sweatbox" in the summer, he said.

He's certainly broken down on occasion, and was unfortunate enough to hit deer on two separate occasions last year, knocking his van out of commission for weeks.

Asked why he kept his van for all those miles, Mr. Schell said he "really enjoyed not making payments, so I decided that I'm going to keep it going all the way."

Mr. Schell started a Web site several months ago, [www.millionmilevan.com](http://www.millionmilevan.com), to mark his march toward a million miles. On the Web site, he documents not only his van's history but where he was when he hit each significant step toward 1 million.

He recounts previous efforts to notify the manufacturer of his brand of oil, Valvoline, of the milestone. The oil company sent him a two-year-old hat to mark the achievement, he said.

Though automobiles with 1 million miles are rare,

they're not unheard of. A 1966 Volvo owned by a New York man has more than 2 million miles on it, but that car doesn't regularly haul 3,000 pounds of auto parts halfway across the United States, as Mr. Schell's van does.

And even though Ford's Mr. Cain offered to personally spon-

sor a "friends and family" discount on a new vehicle for Mr. Schell, he said he plans to keep his van.

"I'm sure I could get 100,000 more miles out of it, easy," Mr. Schell said.

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*~ Jim Cain,  
Spokesperson for Ford Motor Co.*

## UNION MEETING

Our next membership meeting is

**Sunday, March 9**

at the

Southview High School, 2270 E. 42nd St., in Lorain.



## RETIREE'S MEETING

Our next meeting is

**Thursday, March 6**

at the

UAW Local 2000 Union Hall on Abbe Rd.