

## After 30 Years, the Familiar Mail Truck Is Ready to Retire

Most people don't give much thought to the trucks mail carriers use when delivering the mail. We all recognize them, of course, and typically treat them with a sort of built-in caution when maneuvering around them as they scoot from one mailbox to the next. And even if the typical contents of our mailboxes are primarily advertisements and bills, we still experience a bit of hopeful anticipation when we see that rectangular white truck sporting the U.S. Postal Service logo pull up.

The postal service recently announced that those trucks we're all so familiar with are almost 30 years old, and they're ready to retire them in favor of something with better fuel efficiency, modern safety and comfort features, and more space for packages.

Current trucks only get about nine miles per gallon due to the stop-and-go nature of delivering mail. Fuel is one of the highest budget costs for the U.S. Postal Service, which finished 2014 \$5.51 billion in the red. As they evaluate bids to design and build the new fleet, the postal service will consider both gas-fueled vehicles and those that run on alternate fuel sources.

Current trucks were also built between 1987 and 1994, meaning many of the features we typically take for granted in new vehicles didn't even exist when they rolled off the assembly line. For example, mail trucks do not have air bags, anti-lock breaks, or electronic stability control (ESC), among other common safety features. Additionally, the trucks are no longer manufactured, so parts for repairs and maintenance are expensive, and upgrades or perks, such as seating comfort, are unavailable.

Finally, the type of mail that makes up the bulk of the postal services deliveries has evolved. While letters were once the norm, now packages make up the majority of items mailed. The postal service is looking for truck designs that will make transporting a large volume of packages more efficient.

No new design has been selected yet; the postal service is currently collecting proposals. And while it's certainly easy to understand why engaging a new fleet of more modern trucks is long overdue, it may just take a little time to get used to the new design once it's unveiled.

Then again, perhaps all the innovations will be inside the cab and under the hood, and we'll still see the old, familiar, boxy mail truck making its way down the road for years to come.

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