(Source: Doug Barry – Denali)

Trucks and trailers

Chapter 3

Figure 3.1 *1939 equivalent of an ENG remote, a camera and an announcer, plus a fairly large vehicle.*

Figure 3.2 *Many early remotes were for news events, such as VJ day at Times Square in 1945. Today an ENG truck can show up at a news event and be on the air in a few minutes, and be gone in another few minutes. When this photo was taken, live television news coverage had to be anticipated many hours in advance, as setup would take at least a couple of hours. Early cameras could take half an hour to warm up enough to produce usable video.*

Your Grandparents' Remote Truck

Television Hits the Road

Television remotes are done from remote trucks, or sometimes fly packs — suitcases that carry all the gear normally found in a truck and are handy for that shipboard remote, or the 82nd floor of a high-rise. Remote trucks come in all sizes, from a modified SUV to a 53-foot triple expando weighing in at 80,000 lbs. Let's take a chronological look at some trucks, and kick some tires …

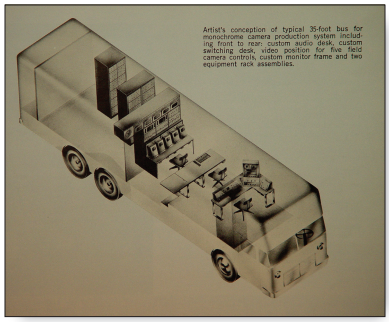


Figure 3.3 *A common truck of the '50s and '60s was based on a truck body from Gerstenslager, referred to by some as "Lurch" because the front of the truck resembled the character from "The Adams Family." Here is a suggested layout from RCA. WBAP-TV and WSMW-TV photos showing this truck follow (see Figures 3.5 and 3.13).*

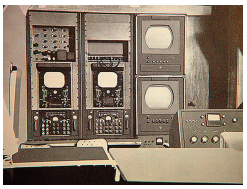


Figure 3.4 *1950s monitor wall. The two left monitors, one for each of the two cameras on board, were shared by everyone in the truck, including the video operator. The video controls for each camera are below those two monitors. The two right monitors were program and preview monitors. The two cameras were usually the only two sources onboard the truck.*

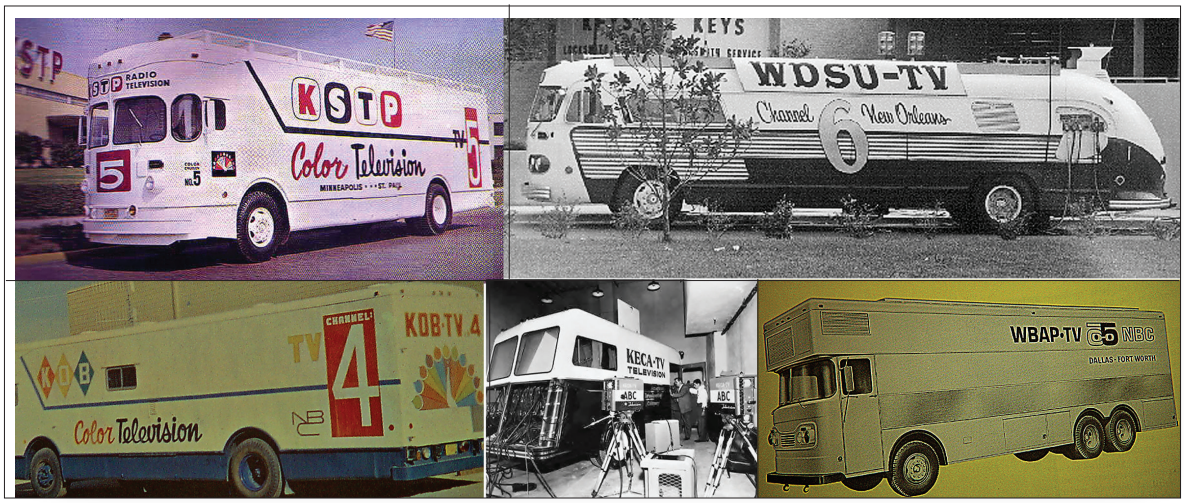


Figure 3.5 *Many local television stations had their own large trucks. Before ENG and EFP, simple television production on location often took vehicles that were 35 feet long. The infrastructure to take two television cameras into the field wasn't much more than to take just one, so multiple-camera trucks were the norm. The problem was that the infrastructure for that first camera was enormous by today's standards. Standard complement was two black-and-white cameras (KECA — later KABC), four black-and-whites (WDSU), or a combination of two color and four black-and-whites (KSTP and KOB). The most ambitious was six color cameras (WBAP), but this was on a late 1960s truck, while the KECA van was 20 years prior. Of the trucks shown, only KOB (also a late '60s truck) and the WBAP truck carried VTRs. KOB had one, and WBAP carried two, which was impressive for the time.*

Television equipment, up until the late 1960s, wasn't designed to be taken on the road easily. But too much compelling programming was available outside of the studio. Television could take the viewer to places they would probably never go, to see events that they most likely wouldn't see. Early equipment was big, heavy and prone to failure. Most early trucks only carried a couple of cameras, with the hope that at least one would work when it was airtime. VTRs weren't found in trucks until the late 1950's.

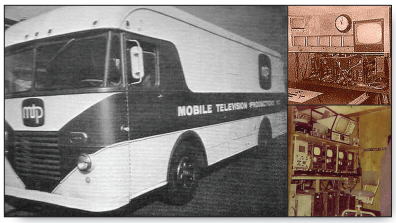


Figure 3.6 *Another Gerstenslager truck with an original configuration that included four black-and-white cameras. The mid-1960s saw the addition of a two-inch VTR and a vidicon camera to shoot the output of a slide projector, approximating a crude film chain.*

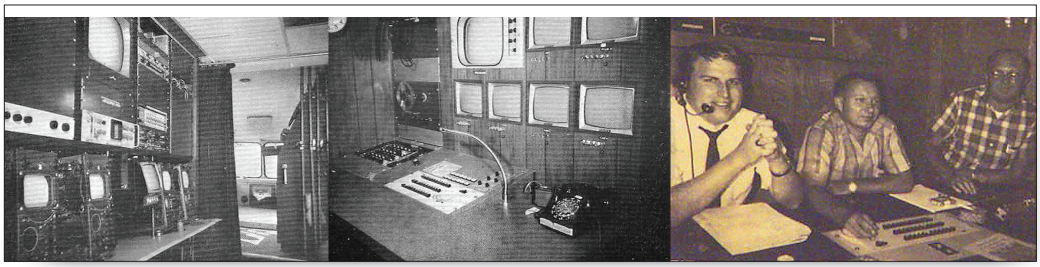
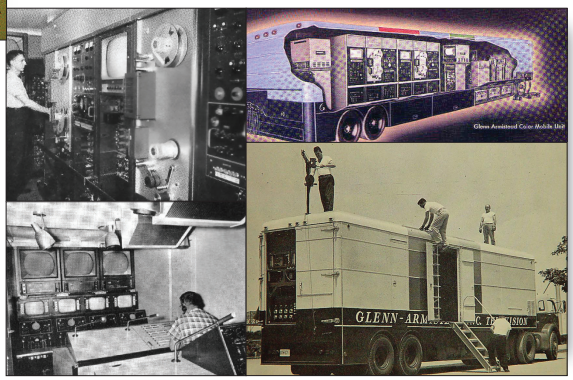


Figure 3.7 *Most trucks undergo extensive modification over their lifetimes. The truck in Figure 3.6 was no exception. Its layout was changed again in the late '60s. The photo on the right shows the director, TD and audio operator in a cramped production space.*

Figure 3.8 *Two tractor-trailer units used by Chicago television stations in the '60s and into the 1970s. The tractor-trailer unit allowed the equipment compartment to be separate from the vehicle drive. Trailers allowed for more equipment and people space than a step-van, or box-cab vehicle. Because the tractor-trailer unit could carry more, it weighed more, resulting in more regulation of the truck and more costs.*

Figure 3.9 *A rare two-truck unit in the early 1960s, used by the networks for prime-time shows done on location. The top two photos are of the tape trailer. This trailer housed two RCA TRT-1 VTRs and a film chain. A film chain, also known as a film island, consisted of one or two specialized film projectors and a slide projector whose light could be directed into a specialized television camera via a series of mirrors. The bottom two photos are of the production trailer for the four-color camera.*



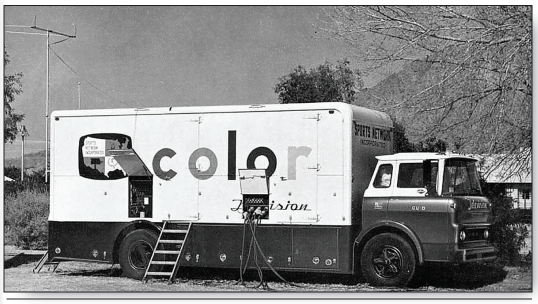


Figure 3.10 *Sports Network, the original independent multitruck production vendor, had a number of these box-cab trucks. They originally carried four RCA TK-41s, and were eventually retrofitted with GE PE-250s. These trucks carried no VTRs.*

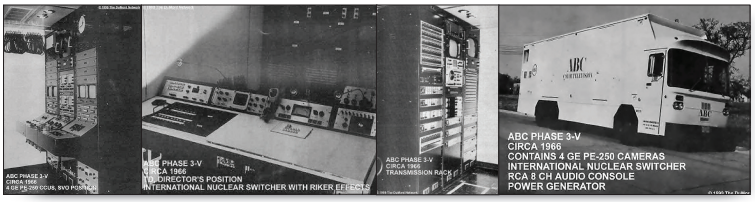


Figure 3.11 *Tour of a '60s ABC production truck. ABC named successive trucks Phase 1, 2, 3, etc. A tape truck traveled in tandem with this truck. (Source: Bill Frieberger - The Dumont Network)*

Equipment Double Duty

Early trucks that only had a couple of sources were large. Early trucks with more sources were even larger. Equipment was large and not very reliable, and consumed a lot of power. But by the end of the 1960s, technology was coming on line that would let the smaller trucks get smaller, and the large ones get larger, as we will see next. ■

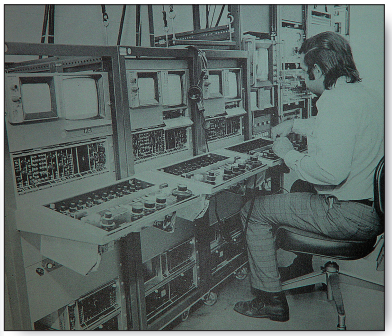


Figure 3.12 *Some stations shared cameras and other production gear for inside and outside productions by putting gear on wheels. This video operator's position supporting three RCA TK-44 cameras was on wheels so that it could be wheeled into a rental truck for remote productions for a PBS station in the early 1970s.*

Figure 3.13 *This truck was a central part of programming WSMW-TV, a Wooster, MA, TV station. A number of broadcasters, noticeably stations owned by Kaiser Broadcasting, experimented with extensive remote production to fill programming schedules in the late 1960s. The station moved camera heads between truck and studio as needed.*

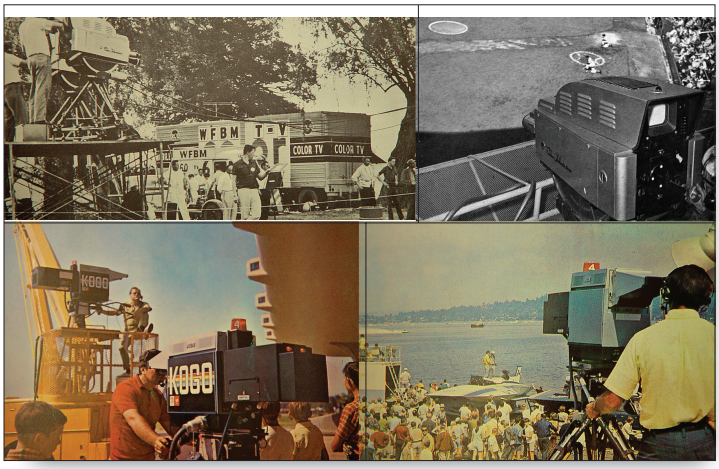


Figure 3.14 *Early color cameras were big, and trucks weren't able to carry many. The end of the '60s saw cameras reduced in size and weight, with much better video quality and reliability. Trucks started carrying more cameras, and finding assignments television hadn't covered before. The top two photos are of RCA TK-41s, the standard color camera at the start of the 1960s. The bottom two shots are of RCA's TK-44s, available by the close of the '60s. RCA's main competition in the early 1960s was from GE; at the end of the decade it was Norelco (eventually part of Philips, which is now part of Thomson). (See Figure 3.15 below.)*

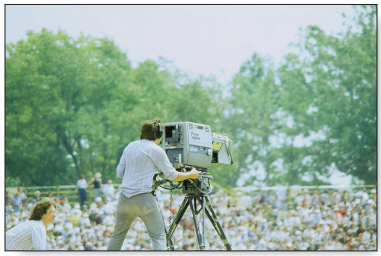


Figure 3.15 *Norelco PC-70 (Source: Doug Barry – Denali)*

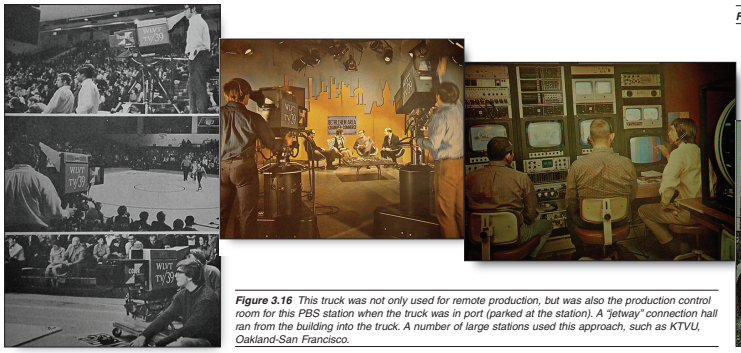


Figure 3.16 *This truck was not only used for remote production, but was also the production control room for this PBS station when the truck was in port (parked at the station). A "jetway" connection hall ran from the building into the truck. A number of large stations used this approach, such as KTVU, Oakland-San Francisco.*