

Dodge entered the world of half-ton, four-wheel-drive pickups in 1957 with the introduction of the first W-100 Power Wagon. It was available on either long or short wheelbases with either a six-and-a-half-foot or a seven-and-a-half-foot box. The 1957 and 1958 W-100s used regular 8¾-inch Chrysler Corp. RA-36 rear axles with Spicer (Dana) 44 front axles.

Beginning in 1959, W-100s turned into what were essentially “light” ¾-ton four-wheel-drives with Dana 60 rear axles and eight-lug wheels. For 1959 and 1960, however, they were still produced in both long- and short-wheelbase variations.

With the introduction of all-new trucks for the 1961 model year and continuing through 1968, Dodge made W-100 4X4s, which were nothing less than short-wheelbase, ¾-ton, four-wheel-drive pickups. In every specification except wheelbase and box length, they were identical to their W-200 brethren. W-100s of this period had a 114-inch wheelbase with a six-and-a-half-foot-long box while W-200s came with an eight-foot box on a 122-inch wheelbase. Both used Dana 60 rear axles and Dana 44 front axles, and eight-lug wheels and carried the same spring ratings.

By 1968, Dodge W-100s were starting to look fairly truck-like in comparison to better riding, lower, and easier-to-operate half-ton 4X4s being offered by Ford, Chevrolet/GMC, and Jeep. Dodge’s answer to this was the introduction of the 1969 W-100 (the company’s first “true” half-ton 4X4 since the 1958 W-100). It arrived with a lower ride height, five-lug wheels, available 15-inch tires, and softer springs. For the first time since 1960, the W-100 was available in either long- or short-wheelbase form. This new half-ton W-100 proved to be very popular. When the next new Dodge truck line appeared in 1972, the chassis configuration introduced with the 1969 W-100 models was carried on.



For an original, unrestored engine compartment, the W-100’s 360ci V-8 is amazingly clean.



Seven-year-old Sally Bledsoe is seen here with the black Power Wagon shortly after her dad acquired it in 2008.



The Bledsoes’ 1974 W-100 Power Wagon was not so shiny when Sam Bledsoe brought it home in 2008. The plug in the gas filler hole is a factory item. On two-wheel-drive models, the gas tank was in the frame with the gas cap on the box side.



Sixteen-year-old Sally Bledsoe is understandably proud of her Power Wagon.



In 1974, lap belts were all that were required in pickups. One of the few flaws in the W-100's interior can be seen on the driver's side of the all-vinyl black seat.



Bledsoe's W-100 is loaded with options, such as a factory clock, AM/FM radio, and cargo light.



The NP 205 transfer case is conveniently controlled by a single lever.



In later years, Dodge moved its window cranks out from the door panels so as to avoid the small scar seen here on the driver's door panel.

delivery, he installed a set of 15x8.5-inch Ansen Sport wheels with Goodyear 31x11.50x15-inch tires to dress up the truck and replace the rather plain white factory wheels (which did not even come with small hubcaps). He also added a camper topper, dual exhausts, and a chrome aftermarket rear step bumper, along with a carpeted bed-rug kit.

Sometime after purchasing the Dodge, Thompson moved to Richmond, California, where he continued to use the Power Wagon for his daily transportation as well as for a hunting and fishing vehicle. In the early 1990s, Thompson fell ill, and the pickup was parked. Ultimately, Thompson passed away, and, in 2008, his widow listed the W-100 for sale on craigslist for the princely sum of \$600.

By this time, the Dodge had been sitting under a tarp beside the garage for about 16 years. Bledsoe saw the ad and went to look at the Dodge. What he found was a well-preserved truck. Except for the additional equipment noted above, it was very original and unmolested. After producing the required \$600 in cash, Bledsoe and a friend got the truck running, aired up the tires, added brake fluid, bled the brakes, and drove it up on the car trailer for the trip home to Dinuba, California.

By this time, the black paint was showing the effects of 34 years of sun, rain, and tarp damage; the topper was rotten, and the bed rug had aged decidedly. Bledsoe wanted the Power Wagon to look as good as possible, but he also wanted to preserve as much of its

originality as possible, so he decided to give it a complete paint job, including the inside of the box in its original color. The sheetmetal was in near-perfect condition with no rust. As you can see from the photos, the results are incredible. Because the topper was equipped with a back gate and a back door, the original tailgate had never been used and, as a bonus, came with the pickup in nearly new condition, including the trim. The 1974 camper was discarded as well as the bed-rug kit so that the near-perfect repainted steel bed floor could be displayed (no spray-in bedliner here). Along with the paint job, all the exterior side trim and emblems were replaced with NOS items. The argent paint in the NOS side trim that Bledsoe found did not all



Sam Bledsoe and daughter Sally pose with Sally's black Power Wagon.



Seen from the rear, the black W-100 shows off its glossy paint and abundant bright trim.



Fiberglass door panels with a wood-grain insert were a part of the Adventurer Sport package.



The original stainless steel, 6x10-inch, low-mount mirrors were polished at the time the truck was refurbished.

match, so he paint-stripped the argent center section and repainted it as a unit to achieve a perfect match. The grille is a new, painted, surplus military piece that was stripped of its paint and polished, as were the original stainless steel drip rail moldings, stainless front and back window trim, and low-mount mirrors. During this stage of the refurbishment project, as Bledsoe stood looking at the W-100 one day, the idea of creating a Fargo Power Wagon took root. After all, other than emblems and decals, Dodges and Fargos were the same.

The Goodyear Wrangler A/T tires that had been on the pickup since 1974 had considerable dry rot in them. These were replaced with 32x11.50x15-inch BFGoodrich All Terrain T/As. When

Bledsoe was getting the pickup ready for paint, he removed the rear spare tire carrier and found one of the factory Goodyear Suburbanite H-78x15-inch Poly-Glass tires still in the carrier. The aftermarket step-type back bumper, which had been installed when the W-100 was new, was replaced with a factory-correct chrome rear contour bumper. At present, the Power Wagon is wearing a pair of NOS 1976 white park lights that Bledsoe would like to replace with 1974 amber units, providing a perfect pair can be found. He would also like to find a pair of the original Ansen center caps for the rear wheels.

Once the outside of the truck was refurbished to Bledsoe's exacting requirements, he decided that the

drivetrain and interior did not require anything except a thorough cleaning and fluid change, making this truck a rare combination of partial restoration and well-preserved original. Some things are not 100 percent perfect. For instance, there is a tear in the seat upholstery on the driver's side, the original seat shows some minimal wear, and the driver-side door panel has a very slight mark from the window crank, but Bledsoe has elected to leave them as-is in the interest of preserving originality.

The black W-100 appears to have found a permanent home. Bledsoe has already promised the truck to his oldest daughter, Sally, who is seen in the accompanying photos along with her Fargo Power Wagon. 