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2008 Dodge Grand Caravan Product Heritage

In the late 1970s, Baby Boomers were reaching adulthood and starting families in large numbers. But sedans and station wagons, the traditional standard-bearers among family transportation vehicles, were becoming smaller in response to concerns about pollution and fuel efficiency – and their passenger and cargo capacity was being reduced. Vans created for the commercial delivery market were being customized as passenger vehicles, but their large size, inefficiency and front-engine, rear-wheel drive configurations made them unsatisfactory substitutes for wagons and sedans as family transportation vehicles. Under the leadership of executives Lee Iacocca and Hal Sperlich, Chrysler initiated development of a new type of vehicle that would offer considerable passenger and cargo-carrying space in a family-friendly package.

Despite the apparent advantages of the concept — a small van with front-wheel drive that could offer consumers more space and greater fuel economy — many obstacles had to be overcome. The final design needed to be low enough to fit in a typical home garage and travel through a standard car wash. The proposed front-wheel drivetrain, which permitted a flat floor and created more interior room, also required special front-end styling considerations, including a functional “nose” to house the engine and offer “crush space” in case of accident. Once all those criteria were met, the new concept – not really a car, not really a truck — had to be styled as an attractive, family vehicle that would appeal to a broad spectrum of potential buyers.

The result was referred to within Chrysler as the “T-115” – but ultimately branded as the Dodge Caravan and Plymouth Voyager. Prior to launch, these distinctive but untested vehicles would compete with Chrysler’s successful new K-car platforms for technical and financial resources. But, following its runaway success, it would be this new product, soon popularly described as the “minivan,” that brought consumers – lots of them – into Chrysler dealerships.

The launch of the minivan in 1983 as a 1984 model year vehicle created an all-new product segment. Car and Driver described it as “the only American-built van that’s not a truck,” noting that the T-115 was ten inches narrower, 15 inches lower and about four feet shorter than the most popular conventional vans. Observed Road & Track, “Chrysler is betting there’s a big market for a van of this size and is aiming it at current station wagon owners; those who already own larger, less efficient club wagons; growing families; those who need station wagons but hate the stodgy suburban image; women who aren’t comfortable driving large conventional vans; people who used to own full-sized sedans and like plenty of interior room, and those who just enjoy the sheer novelty of the vehicle.”

The company’s bet was well placed. One day in 1983, when members of Chrysler’s Houston zone office drove to lunch in a newly-delivered minivan, a lady approached them in the restaurant’s parking lot and unhesitatingly asked, “What is this and where can I buy one?” The initial marketing, featuring popular magician Doug Henning, aptly described the vehicle as “The Magic Wagon.”

The Chrysler minivan was an instant success and, despite spirited competition from other automakers over three decades, has always been the best-selling minivan in the United States.

1984-1990 model years: The first-generation Chrysler minivans were based on the S platform, a derivative of the Chrysler K platform used for the Dodge Aries and Plymouth Reliant passenger cars. Three trim levels were available on the first Dodge Caravan and Plymouth Voyager models – a base level, the “mainstream” SE and the “upscale” LE, which featured vinyl “woodgrain” side panels. The standard four-cylinder engine could be mated with a three-speed TorqueFlite automatic transmission or a five-speed manual. An early Chrysler minivan featuring the rare turbocharged 2.5-liter engine (available only in 1989 and 1990) is now considered a collector’s item by many.

Both the Caravan and the Voyager were on Car and Driver magazine’s “Ten Best” list for 1985.

The Mini-Ram Van, a cargo version of the Caravan, also appeared in 1984. Renamed the Caravan C/V in 1989, it

was discontinued after the 1995 model year.

In 1987, the Caravan and Voyager received some cosmetic updates – and new, longer-wheelbase Grand Caravan and Grand Voyager models were introduced.

1990 model year: The Chrysler Town & Country, a luxury version of the Chrysler minivan, was introduced (see the Town & Country Heritage section). The Town & Country nameplate dated to 1941 and had been used on a variety of Chrysler vehicles until 1988.

The standard Town & Country minivan was considered "loaded," with no optional trim levels. Power locks, windows, mirrors and driver's seat, front and rear air conditioning and leather seats were all standard. The 3.8-liter V-6 engine was made standard in the Town & Country in 1994.

1991-1996 model years: Chrysler's hot-selling minivans were freshened for the 1991 model year, and more option packages became available. Innovations included "Quad Command" bucket seating (standard on the Town & Country beginning in 1992); integrated child safety seats (1992), available anti-lock brakes (1992), the first driver's side airbag in a minivan (1991, made standard in 1992), and the first dual front airbags (1994). This was the first minivan to meet 1998 U.S. federal safety standards (1994).

The 1991-1995 minivans used the AS platform, the last to be derived from the Chrysler K platform. Special "10-Year Anniversary Edition" trim packages were offered in 1994.

1996-2000 model years: Completely redesigned, the 1996 Chrysler minivans debuted in an elaborate program at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, during which Chrysler Chairman Bob Eaton and President Bob Lutz, dressed in Mr. Rogers-style cardigan sweaters, delivered the story of the new minivan from giant storybooks, then watched as one – with television character Kermit the Frog in the driver's window – soared over an artificial pond. It was Chrysler's way of giving notice that this new NS minivan would "leapfrog" all competitors.

Spectacularly upgraded from its predecessor models, the NS was named *Motor Trend magazine's* Car of the Year for 1996 – and appeared on the *Car and Driver* "Ten Best" list for 1996 and 1997.

An industry-first driver's side sliding door proved so popular it was made standard. The manual transmission was dropped and all-wheel drive added. Base models were offered in most states with either a 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine or a Mitsubishi 3.0-liter V-6. In California and several northeastern states with stringent emissions standards, a 3.3-liter engine was offered as a V-6 option between 1997 and 2000. Options added over the life of the NS included CD players, grocery-bag hooks and a rear-seat video entertainment system.

With the demise of the Plymouth brand, the Voyager was rebadged as the Chrysler Voyager after 2001, later becoming the short-wheelbase version of the Town & Country in 2004.

2001-2007 model years: The most recent generation of Chrysler minivans rode on the RS platform. Another benchmark of modern-day Chrysler engineering innovation, the Stow 'n Go second- and third-row foldable seating system, was introduced in 2005. Power sliding doors and a power hatch, options beginning in 2001, later became standard.

Freshening the exterior, continually adding new safety features and providing additional cargo space, better entertainment systems, more cupholders, grocery hooks and other family-friendly features has kept Chrysler's minivans at the top of their segment in popularity and sales.

2008 model year: Chrysler is now positioned to again make minivan history. In addition to thoroughly updating the many successful features of their predecessors, the new Dodge Grand Caravan and Chrysler Town & Country minivans offer one-of-a-kind available features like Swivel 'n Go second-row seats, which revolve to face the rear seats. A table can be placed between the second- and third-row seats, providing a convenient place for passengers to read, work or enjoy meals and games.

Both these features reflect well on Chrysler's proud heritage of innovative engineering: swivel bucket seats were standard on top-of-the-line Chrysler passenger cars in the late 1950s, and in the 1960s the Chrysler Imperial featured a "Mobile Director" option, in which the front passenger's bucket seat swiveled 180 degrees to the rear and the center rear armrest unfolded to create a three-position conference table. The all-new 2008 minivan effectively updates these once-revolutionary ideas for the 21st Century, writing the latest chapter in Chrysler's continuing saga

of industry-leading engineering.

Then & Now:

	1984 MY Dodge Grand Caravan	2008 MY Dodge Grand Caravan
Wheelbase:	112 in. (284 cm)	121.2 in. (307.8 cm)
Weight:	3,100 lbs. (1,408 kg)	4,483 lbs. (2,038 kg)
Engine (as equipped):	OHC inline four-cylinder	Single OHC V-6 (one example)
Horsepower:	96 hp (72 kw)	197 hp (147 kw)
Displacement:	135 cu. in. (2.2 L)	230.5 cu. in. (3.8 L)
Bore/Stroke:	3.44 in. x 3.63 in. (8.8 cm x 9.2 cm)	3.78 in. x 3.43 in. (9.6 cm x 8.7 cm)
Compression ratio:	9.0:1	9.6:1
Transmission:	Torqueflite three-speed transaxle	Six-speed automatic, adaptive electronic control
Suspension:	Front independent MacPherson struts, rear coil springs	Front independent MacPherson struts, rear twist-beam axle with coil springs
Brakes:	Front disc, rear drum, power assist	Front and rear: disc brakes, anti-lock (ABS)

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