

## In Search of the Perfect Mini-Van

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Recently, my husband and I decided to purchase a new mini-van that would accommodate my Lark three-wheeled electric scooter that is 24" wide and 43" long. Our priorities for our search included buying a product made in America, as well as a vehicle that would allow some use of the third



row of seats while carrying the scooter. We were also hoping to find a vehicle that would provide full use of the van when all seats were removed or stowed (without the scooter), so we could transport large objects such as a 4' x 8'

piece of plywood, or even a piano, as we once did with our former vehicle, a 1996 Dodge Grand Caravan.

What we discovered was that almost every mini-van now has some form of seating that folds into the floor. This type of seating severely hampers the flexibility for mounting a scooter lift at the rear and for moving the seats. With Chrysler's "Stow-n-Go," the 40% side of the split third seat would either have to be permanently "stowed," or the lift installed partially in the well preventing the seat from ever going flat. The scooter would then go lengthwise onto the stowed 60% side, thus either no use of the third row, or at best only the 40% side.

The Ford Freestar has a bench seat that doesn't move forward or split, and folds down into a well. However, there's no room for a scooter with the seat up. The new Ford Freestyle third row seat splits 50/50 and folds down, but the opening with one seat down wasn't wide enough for the scooter.

General Motors has a new line of mini-vans: Chevy Uplander, Pontiac Montana SV6 and the Buick Terraza. On these vehicles, the third row does not move forward to allow space for a scooter. Also, the seats that split 50/50 fold forward and flat, but then leave an awkward raised floor, which makes it impractical to place a scooter on this split-level floor.

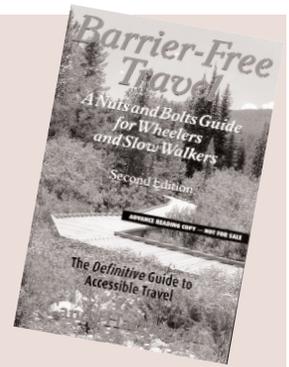
Finally, after looking at many vehicles, we found one that suited our needs.

**Wheelchair Getaways** provides short-term and long-term rentals of vans equipped with raised roofs or lowered floors, wheelchair lifts or ramps, plus interiors and tie-down systems. Some vehicles are equipped with power doors, outside-entry controls, six-way power seats in the driver's position, and hand controls to maximize independence. For more information on renting a van from the Wheelchair Getaways nearest you, call 800-642-2042 or visit [www.wheelchairgetaways.com](http://www.wheelchairgetaways.com).

**Barrier-Free Travel – A Nuts and Bolts Guide for Wheelers and Slow Walkers**

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The definitive guide to accessible travel, authored by *Emerging Horizons'* editor, Candy Harrington is a well-researched resource containing detailed information about the logistics of planning accessible travel by plane, train, bus and ship. It is filled with resources, travel tips and updated information about accessible travel options.



We purchased a late 2004 model Pontiac Montana (not the newer SV6 model). The 50/50 third row seats “tumble” forward (no wells), and we had our Ranger Atlas lift installed. With both seats tumbled forward, the scooter easily fits behind the seats. If desired, one of the tumbled seats can be raised back up after the scooter is placed in the van. While it is awkward to do, after the scooter is in, the lift can be removed, placed elsewhere in the van, and, with some jockeying of the scooter, both seats can be raised. This is not easy, and we would only do it under extreme need. But, at least using half of the third row is reasonable. Also, the seats and the lift can be removed for full use of the van, when

not needing the scooter. The Uplander Chevy Venture has this same arrangement, but none of the other amenities.

It is a shame that American car manufacturers don't have persons with disabilities in mind when designing vehicles. If you're searching for a mini-van to accommodate a scooter, we hope the story of our quest will be of help to you. ●

*US Department of Transportation brochure, "Adapting Motor Vehicles for People with Disabilities," is available by calling 888-327-4236 or visiting [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov).*

