

Family Affair

The Dodge WC series of vehicles came in several variants that all contributed towards the war effort

A staggering number of Dodge trucks were built during World War Two. More than 400,000 of these rugged, yet versatile wartime warriors were manufactured from 1941 to 1945, demonstrating the industrial might wielded by the US during the conflict.

To put that number in perspective, in 1937, just two years before the outbreak of war, the US Army had a fleet of 11,600 vehicles, with about a third to a half of those bearing the Dodge name badge.

As the threat of war grew, the army quickly realised it needed to add half-ton vehicles to its fleet and, having already supplied the military, Dodge was in the driving seat to deliver more.


The model was designated the Dodge half-ton 4x4 Series VC and since most were built in 1940, were assigned the year as the model number. The VC series never saw action in the war, however, and a redesign of the hood and cab saw the introduction of the 1941 Series WC Dodge half-ton 4x4. It was the first all-military design Dodge developed in the build-up to full mobilisation.

The lightweight Dodge WC-series (W:1941, C: half-ton) trucks were offered in various body styles, the most common being the command car, weapons carrier, a hardtop-cab pickup, a panel truck, a hardtop-cab emergency repair truck, ambulance and a carry-all.

Production was broken into three series,

denoted by a four-digit engineering code as the first part of the engine serial number, stamped on the left side of the block just below the head. Based on Chrysler Corporation figures from 1946, nearly 80,000 units were produced during 1941 and 1942.

While regarded as being successful, the half-ton series was then replaced by the three-quarter-ton series in 1942. The new series carried the T214 engine code but retained the six-cylinder in-line, L-head engine. The redesign gave the Dodge WC series a very different look, most notably a lower profile cargo area that was now able to seat an eight-man rifle squad and their gear on top of the rear wheels, instead of between them as in previous models. ►

A man in a tan jacket and blue trousers stands with his arms crossed next to a German Shepherd dog. They are in front of a green Dodge WC series vehicle with a canvas top. The vehicle has 'A-3' on the front bumper. The background shows a field and some trees.

Steve Bowens and his dog Sadie pose with the Dodges. Both are stored with Steve in Cambridgeshire as he has the space for them

The vehicle was a non-runner when Steve took ownership, but he soon got it working again



SPECIFICATIONS

Series WC-52
Total built 59,114
Weight 2,518kg
Length 4.48m
Width 2.1m
Payload 680kg
Engine Dodge T-214
Type six-cylinder four-cycle inline petrol 74 kW
Suspension Semi-elliptic leaf spring
Operational range 290km on road
Speed 89km/h on road

Series WC-55
Total built 5,380
Weight 3,330kg
Length 4.52m (with winch)
Width 2.24m
Payload 540kg
Crew Four: Commander, gunner, loader, driver
Main armament 37mm gun
Engine Dodge T-214
Type Six-cylinder four-cycle inline petrol 74 kW
Suspension Semi-elliptic leaf spring
Operational range 290km on road
Speed 89km/h on road

'The Dodge has been quite easy to maintain and is a reliable vehicle'





The WC-52 is fitted with the original T214 engine



The WC-52 is differentiated from the WC-51 by the winch



A map-reading board slides out from under the dash



The WC-52 was able to seat eight on two bench seats



Some 59,114 WC-52s were produced

Other changes included under-seat storage and a distinctly different flat bonnet design. The vehicles were also widened and shortened, altering their proportions. Despite these changes, service parts remained 80% interchangeable with the previous series, which allowed for ease of maintenance and repairs. It also meant the three-quarter-ton models could be deployed quickly while the earlier WC-series trucks remained in use until the end of the war.

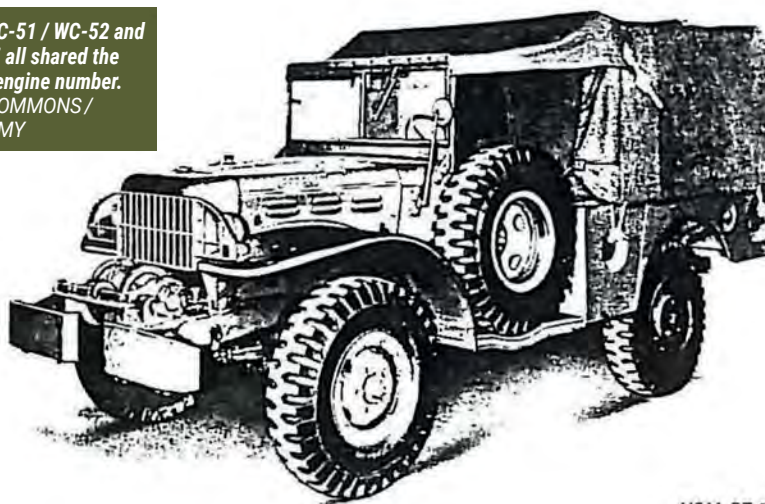
In total, more than 255,000 three-quarter-ton WC-series trucks were built from 1942 to 1945. Models included the WC-51 and WC-52 weapons carrier, WC-56, 57 and 58 command or Reconnaissance cars, WC-53 Carryall, WC-54 Ambulance and WC-55 Gun Motor Carriage.

While the vehicles pictured are almost identical, the one on the left in the main picture is a WC-52 while the one on the right originally came out the factory as a WC-55 before being converted back to a 52 during the war.

WC-52

The fact that the three-quarter-ton WC-series vehicles share many of the same features can make it difficult to differentiate between them. The WC-51 and WC-52 were the most prolific of the series, with the two models making up nearly three-quarters of the 255,000 units built. Some 123,541 received the WC-51 (without winch) designation and 59,114 the WC-52 (with winch) designation for a total of 182,655 units. This number

The WC-51 / WC-52 and WC-55 all shared the same engine number. WIKICOMMONS / US ARMY



USM-BT-11



The three-quarter-ton WC series featured wider and lower proportions compared to previous models



*Ammunition just unloaded from an RAF Dakota is loaded onto what appears to be a WC-52 at an airstrip in Burma, March 1945.
WIKICOMMONS / IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM*

***'In total, more than 255,000
3/4-ton WC-series trucks were
built from 1942 to 1945'***

increases to around 188,000 if you include the 5,380 WC-55s that were built.

Used to ferry cargo or personnel around, the highly versatile open cab pickup could be fitted with an optional M24A1 machine gun mount, which bolted onto the cargo area floor behind the front seats. The mount could carry the M1918 Browning Automatic Rifle, the M1919 Browning machine gun, or the M2 Browning machine gun.

The WC-52 pictured here is owned by Cambridgeshire resident Steve Bowens who bought it in 2015 from Dallas Auto Parts. "We think it's a 1943 or 1944 model, but have not been able to confirm that yet," explained Steve. "It was still fitted with its original T214 engine but was a non-runner when I got it.

"After taking it home I found it had a cracked inlet manifold. I replaced the manifold and got a new gasket along with other bits and pieces, cleaned the head, put the engine back together, gave it a basic service, adjusted the brakes and fired it up and away we went."

Steve said the work had taken him 'a few weeks' as he was only able to devote time to it on weekends. He knows little about the vehicle's wartime history but says after the war it saw service with the Norwegian Army where it spent most of its life.

"It was released in the early 1990s and sold to a private owner and was apparently in *Saving Private Ryan*, so is something of a film star," he said. "At some stage, it was also used to cart beaters around on a shooting estate."

As wartime vehicles go, Steve said the Dodge was a pleasure to own. "The prices for these have been going up but you can still get decent examples for around £12,000 to £13,000 but can also find some which need a bit of work for between £6,000 and £8,000.

"If you use it regularly, keep it stored nice and dry and maintain it, it won't give you a lot of problems – no worse than a Jeep that is. It's not as easy as a Jeep to work on as the engine bay doesn't have a lot of room and it can be quite an awkward vehicle to work on depending on what needs doing. But overall, it's a great vehicle to own, looks impressive going down the road and is not a bad ride." ■



The spare tyre located on the driver's side of the vehicle



The dash with its associated gauges and instruments



A water or fuel container could be carried on the side

WC-55

The WC-55, also known as the 37mm Gun Motor Carriage M6 or M6 Fargo was a modified WC-52 featuring a light anti-tank gun. Used by the US Army for infantry support and as a mobile anti-tank gun, it was in use from late 1942 to January 1945 in the Mediterranean, Europe and Pacific but ultimately saw limited use. The vehicle was not popular with troops as it provided no armoured protection other than the armoured gun shield and had to be reversed into firing position because the gun could not be fired forwards due to the blast effect on the crew and windshield.

This did at least allow for a quick exit from the battlefield when the enemy started firing back. The 37mm gun was also considered too small to render it effective against German armour of the time. It fired projectiles that could penetrate 3.6cm of armour at 460m in addition to Armor Piercing Capped M51 projectiles that could penetrate 6.1cm of

armour at the same distance or a High Explosive (HE) projectile.

A total of 5,380 units were built between April and October 1942 with one online source giving a cost of \$4,265 per unit. The intention was for WC-55 crews to defend against enemy tanks attacks while Allied tanks would be used in infantry support roles.

However, the introduction of more powerful tank destroyers featuring 75mm and 76mm guns soon rendered the WC-55 obsolete. Many had their 37mm guns removed and were converted back to WC-52 cargo trucks, like David 'Paddy' Walden's vehicle pictured here.

It's not easy to distinguish between the two, but tell-tale signs are still visible on the chassis of Paddy's vehicle where it was strengthened to prevent twist when the gun was fired. As a WC-55, it would have had a 37mm gun mounted in the load area, two short seats in the cargo area instead of the long bench seats and storage for projectiles in the four corners.

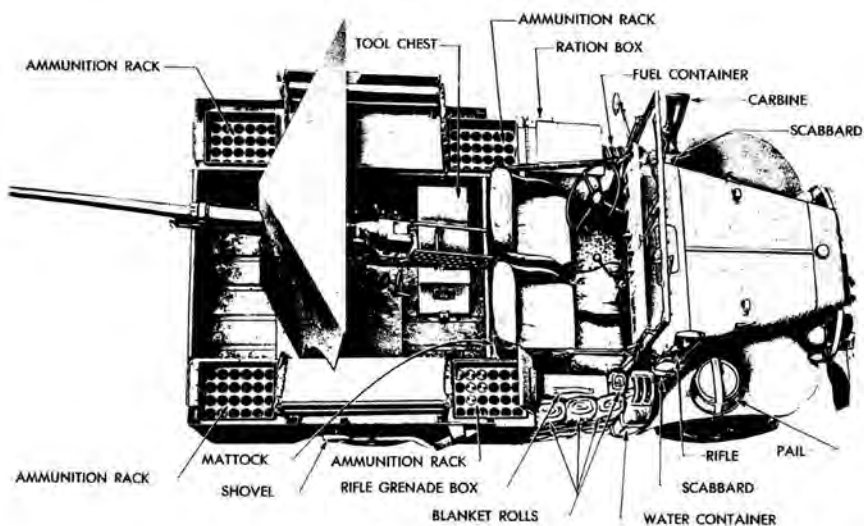


FIGURE O—37MM GUN MOTOR CARRIAGE M-6 (TOP VIEW)

RA PD 320049

A top schematic showing the Dodge WC-55 M6 Gun Motor Carriage. WIKICOMMONS / US ARMY

Steve behind the wheel of Paddy's Dodge





Paddy Walden's vehicle, which originally came out of the factory as a WC-55 was later converted back to a WC-52

'The 37mm gun was also considered too small to render it effective against German armour of the time'

**A good example of what an M6 37mm Gun Motor Carriage looked like.
WIKICOMMONS / US ARMY**



I might do it, but for now, it wouldn't serve our needs. The members love the vehicle and they would certainly not let me sell it. They'd lynch me if I did," Paddy joked.

From an owner's perspective, he said the Dodge was not as easy as the Jeep but the bigger vehicle had its advantages. "When I first got the Dodge, I didn't think I'd like it as it has a crash gearbox and is a lot harder to drive than the Jeep. But now I love it. Yes, the Jeep is easier to live with, in that you can put it in a garage and it's better on fuel, but there are pros and cons to owning both. The Dodge has been quite easy to maintain and is a reliable vehicle, is great fun and if you take the canvas off, you've got a big Jeep!"

"They are quite rare, and a proper WC-55 restoration could sell for €30,000 to €40,000," said Steve.

Paddy, who also lives in Cambridgeshire, bought it from a friend and has had it for about a year. "I also own a 1942 Willys Jeep, which I've been restoring," he said. "My Dodge came out of the factory as a WC-55 and from what I know it went to North Africa where it served with the 9th Infantry Division in Algeria. At some stage, it was sent back for a refit because the gun wasn't man enough to deal with the German armour of the time and they put it back to a 52. It was then sent to Normandy.

"I've given some thought to restoring it to a 55 but getting an original 37mm gun is near on impossible and while there are companies that can make them, they are

expensive," he said. "I also belong to a re-enactment group and we use it all the time to cart the troops around, so if I had to convert it back, it wouldn't suit us as the gun would take up a lot of room."

The group, called the European Theatre of Operations (ETO) Alliance, attends most major military shows throughout the year and is always on the lookout for new members. The ETO Alliance portrays the 502nd Infantry Regiment, which was assigned as a regiment of the 101st Airborne Division. "We attend all the major military shows around the country and drive the Dodge to them so with the 37mm gun in the back there'd be only enough room for four people. Eventually,



To increase firepower, a 50-cal. machine gun was mounted on the front of the M6 37mm GMC (June 1943). WIKICOMMONS / US ARMY