

Liability costs increase rates at Med Center

By Kim Shepherd

Inflation and the increasing cost of liability insurance have caused room rate increases at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, said Arnie Kimmel, assistant administrator of university hospitals and clinics.

Kimmel said that although insurance claims against midwest hospitals are significantly lower than the national average, the increasing number of nationwide claims has caused insurance companies to raise hospitals' insurance rates.

The medical center will pay \$130,970 for liability coverage in fiscal 1976-77. This is an increase of more than 300 per cent over last year. The medical center buys its insurance from Aetna Life and Casualty.

Increased expenses, combined with a 15 per cent increase in food costs and a 25 to 50 per cent increase in the cost of laboratory supplies, caused the medical center to raise its room rates Jan. 1, Kimmel said.

A check with Omaha area hospitals showed the medical center's increases, which averaged 6.8 per cent, make its rates comparable to others. Three of Omaha's ten

hospitals raised their rates Jan. 1, and another did so a few months ago.

Daily rates for private rooms at the medical center were increased from \$82 to \$84, for semi-private rooms from \$67 to \$71 and for four-bed wards from \$62 to \$66. Except for Bergan Mercy Hospital, the rates are within \$2 to \$4 of other Omaha area hospitals.

The rate increases will not add profit to the hospital, but will enable it to meet expenses, Kimmel said, adding that hospital services will not be affected.

"We hope to improve them (services), but you would have to say that this (rate increase) just keeps up with the inflationary rate," said Pete Boughn, executive assistant to Dr. Robert Sparks, medical center Chancellor.

Medical center officials said rate increases will not directly affect the amount of federal money the hospital receives because most of that money is reimbursement for services provided to Medicare and Medicaid patients.

Boughn said the hospital also is subsidized by the state and anyone needing care will be treated, regardless of their ability to pay.

pit stop | 1976 Vega: Good parlor, 'adequate' car

By Jim Williams

The last time this car column covered a specific car was... ah, long, long ago. But this week, for you technical reality fans, I put myself in a new Chevrolet Vega Estate and headed for the secret Pit Stop test track for a thorough thrash.

Vegas have been popular college cars since their 1971 introduction, but the 1976 model includes some needed changes that should improve its image with car people.

The old bouncy rear suspension is gone for a better design from the Monza super coupe, and Chevy's heralded "Dura-Build" warranty shows they think they have the engine's overheating problem licked.

The Vega's engine block is lightweight aluminum alloy, like a Ferrari's. But overheating an aluminum engine can ruin it by warping the block, and the old Vega engine tended to overheat. The new mill has more cooling capacity to lessen the problem.

So the 1976 Vega is acceptable mechanically. But the wagon has some unique advantages over other body styles. The notchback Vega has room for four people, but not much else. The hatchback carries a lot, but its sloping roof cuts into rear headroom. The wagon is the best of both—its flat roof stays up out of riders' hair, while the rear load floor offers a 36- by 42-inch area, or 64- by 42-inch with the back seat folded away.

The cargo travels at low rates. The owner says the test car gets 18 miles-a-gallon in town, 21 on the road, even encumbered with gas-wasting automatic transmission.

The Estate package takes away some of the "bare-bones" feeling. The interior is handsome and tasteful, although the instrument panel is sparse—80-m.p.h. speedometer, fuel gauge and a bank of warning lights.

The front seats are soft and comfortable, although they don't give much side support. The rear seats offer plenty of head and elbow room, but the knees are very tight if the front seats are slid back. It's an acceptable four-passenger car only if all four are short.

So the Vega Estate is a creditable storeroom and not a bad parlor. But as an automobile? It's adequate, but flawed. If enthusiastic driving is your pleasure and a Vega your heart's desire, order the GT package. Its wider wheels and tires, sway bars and other parts will cure several handling ills I found in my test drive.

The trick stuff won't give the Vega much more power, and it is a woefully wimpy car. It has almost no torque, taking 24.4 seconds to go from zero to 60 m.p.h. A VW Rabbit will do this in 13.1 seconds, a Honda Civic CVCC in 13.3. Passing or merging in the Vega requires advance planning.

Handling has more potential. The driving position is very good if you like to drive arms-out. The small, padded steering wheel gives good road feel. Those used to power steering may think the Vega steers hard, but I like it.

But the steering is connected to badly undersized

tires. The car understeers moderately (tries to straighten out) in tight turns while the Positraction rear axle clunks alarmingly. If you lift off the gas in a fast, tight turn, the tail tries to get ahead of the nose (trailing-throttle oversteer). And the rear brakes lock too soon. Brake force should be proportioned so the front wheels slide first, but the Vega's is not. This means if you step hard on the brakes in a sharp turn, the car may spin.

So there you have the Vega Estate. A nice car for taking your sorority sisters out for pizza but frustrated Fittipaldis must look further to meet their needs.

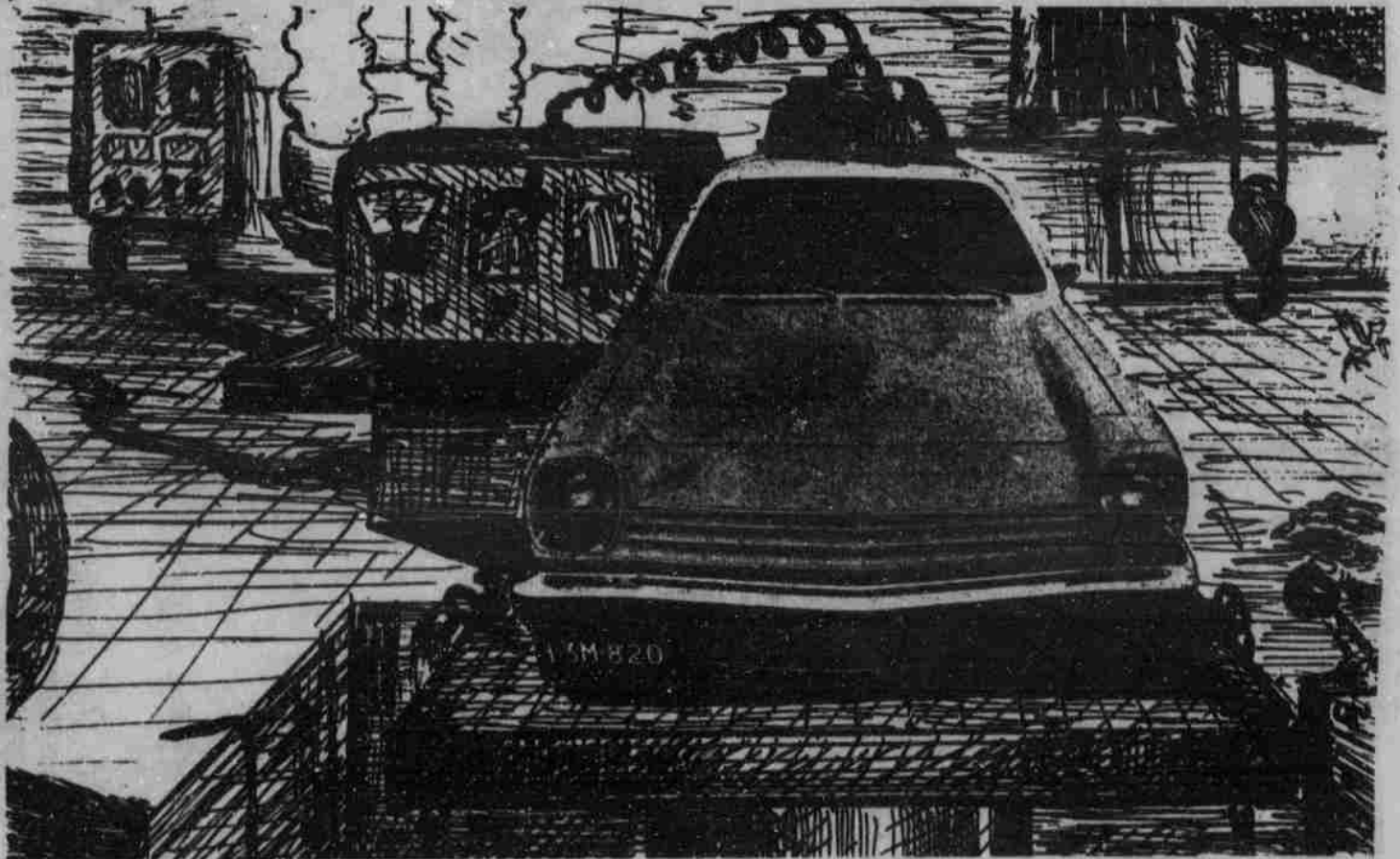



Photo by Jim Williams

1976 VEGA ESTATE SPECIFICATIONS

Type: 4-passenger station wagon
 Length: 175.4" Width: 65.4" Wheelbase: 97.0"
 Engine: 140 c.i. (2.3 liter), 4-in-line, single overhead cam

Transmission: 3-speed automatic
 Tank capacity: 16 gallons
 Tires: bias-belted, A78-13




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