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THE CASE FOR STANDARDIZATION IN RURAL EMS

Balancing Budgets and Performance
for Equitable Care Across Communities

Standardization of processes can improve training consistency, reduce downtime, and support more equitable care across rural communities.

This special supplement from EMS World and Crestline Ambulances explores why rural EMS agencies benefit from standardized ambulance designs that balance budget realities with dependable performance. Drawing on a conversation with Cooper County (Missouri) Ambulance, it highlights how long transport times and limited resources make reliability, safety, cleanability, and a consistent interior layout especially important.

It also offers practical guidance for fleet managers to avoid over-customization, focus on proven systems, and prioritize lifecycle value through simple electrical systems, durable construction, and remountable modules.

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Photos courtesy Crestline Ambulances.



The Crestline CCL 166 Type III ambulance features an enhanced working environment in the patient care area.

PICKING THE RIGHT AMBULANCE FOR RURAL EMS

Rural EMS is a different world than its urban cousin, one that requires ambulances that are reliable, practical, and livable for long drives.

By James Careless for EMS World

In a recent edition of the EMS World Podcast—entitled **“The Case for Standardization: Balancing Budget and Performance in Rural EMS”**—host Mike McCabe spoke with Brian MacLean, Assistant Chief at Cooper County Ambulance (CCA) to talk about the nature of rural EMS and CCA's experience with Crestline ambulances.

Setting the Stage

MacLean began by describing his EMS agency's working environment. “Cooper County is smack dab in the middle of Missouri,” he said. “It's a fairly rural area. We have I-70 running straight through our county. We have 569 square miles with about 17,000 residents. We typically run anywhere between 3,200 and 3,500 calls a year. Now our average transport time—we used to have a hospital here in Booneville, but it closed a few years ago—our average transport times are anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes. Currently we run two units 24 hours a day. We're currently going for a tax increase. If we get that passed, we're going to be putting on a third, so that'll help a little bit on both of those things. Wear and tear on the people and wear and tear on the ambulances as well.”

“The difference between rural and urban EMS is [like] comparing apples and oranges,” added MacLean. “I've spent most of my career in rural EMS because I really, really like it. I like being with my patients for a good long while. I don't like being in a system where it takes me longer to fill out my paperwork than it does to actually run the call. So I really have a passion for rural EMS. You get to do things

TOP AND BOTTOM: Exterior shots of Cooper County's new Crestline CCL 150 Type I ambulance.





THIS PAGE: The interior of Cooper County's Crestline CCL 150 ambulance provides a functional atmosphere for their crew.

that you don't get to do in an urban system, like some of the medications that take half an hour to work, you actually get to see those work. But I'll tell you this: In a rural service with that long a transport time, you have to bring your A game on most every call."

Having the Right Ambulance

Having outlined the reality of his rural EMS working life, MacLean dug into the topic of having the right ambulance for the job—and why CCA prefers Crestline Ambulances.

"We bought our first Crestline ambulance last year, and actually we have another one coming next week," he told McCabe. "We selected Crestline for several different factors. One is the cost: They are a very, very cost-effective unit for what you get. When you're dealing with a unit that has wood cabinetry in it, obviously, they weigh significantly more, so in some cases you're having to downsize your box, or go with a smaller box so that you don't overload your chassis. [However] with Crestline being an all-metal box, it's very strong." McCabe added that every EMS agency balances budget and performance, asking how CCA weighed that with Crestline.





Members of Cooper County EMS with their dealer partner, Pinnacle Emergency Vehicles at EMS World Expo 2025.

"That's really where those Crestline ambulances shine," MacLean said. "Not only are they cost-effective, they're well-built. One of the other factors that really played a big, big deal in us selecting Crestline was the speed in which they delivered. I mean, if you're dealing with a custom ambulance, my best understanding right now is that you're looking at a minimum of 36 months on delivery time. We got our first Crestline a year after we ordered it."

Standardized Design and Other Features

Crestline ambulances are built using a standardized design. "That's one of the ways that they do have that speed of delivery," MacLean said. "However, these ambulances are well planned out. They've thought of almost everything. So yeah, I realize they're pretty standard: There's not a lot of customization that goes on in those. But if I had to finish my career in one of those ambulances, I'd retire happy. It's very well thought out, especially when it comes to safety."

As a person who is 6'1" and 290 lbs., MacLean appreciates the size of the Crestline's CPR seat. "It's a really usable seat," he said. "And the seat belts are well placed so we can be restrained." The Crestline ambulance's compartments are also laid out so that "everything is in reach. [Plus] We labeled everything inside with not only what's in each sub-container, but how many, so it makes the truck check super easy when all the things are clearly labeled."

MacLean went back to Crestline's standardized ambulance design, which he truly appreciates. When an EMS agency is equipped with Crestline ambulances, "no matter how many trucks you have, no matter what truck you're working out of, everything's the same," he said. "And I'll tell you all that powder-coated metal makes keeping that thing clean so easy. That's one thing our guys absolutely love about it is just how easy it is to keep clean."

"The other thing that I really like about [the Crestline] is I can actually stand up

straight in the back," said MacLean. "I can't tell you how many times I've hit my head on the handrail when I was working out of those shorter units—you're kind of hunched over. But being able to stand up straight is such a blessing, and it's something that I took for granted my entire career. I was super envious of those guys that could stand up straight in the back of those short ambulances."

The Bottom Line

Summing up his assessment of Crestline's approach to building ambulances, MacLean commended them for the ruggedness and reliability of their design.

"These guys have an eye for safety," he said. "It is forefront in their thought processes, and they want these units to be some of the safest units out on the market. And I have to tell you, I believe that they are."

HOW FLEET MANAGERS CAN SIMPLIFY AMBULANCE SPEC'ING FOR LONG-TERM VALUE

When searching for new vehicles, prioritize proven systems, plan for your future needs, and avoid reinventing the wheel.

By Kirsten Barnhart for Crestline Ambulances

When a department sets out to buy a new ambulance, it's easy to get lost in the details—options lists, layout debates, and wish-list features that sound great in theory but sometimes complicate the job in practice. For many EMS

fleet managers, balancing reliability, standardization, and value is a constant struggle.

Few people know that challenge better than Kevin Pomasl, who has spent more than three decades helping Wisconsin departments find the right fit through his family-run dealership, Pomasl Fire Equipment.

"Fleet managers who buy three to five trucks a year are typically really price-conscious," Pomasl said. "While every customer is different, most want the same thing. They want reliability, consistency, and a familiar layout across their fleet. They expect their trucks to work, stay in service, and not cause headaches."



**NEW Model: Crestline CCL
166 Type III Ambulance**

RIGHT: Swivel seating in the CCL 166 makes accessing tools a breeze. **BOTTOM:** Exterior view of CCL 166.

The Cost of Customization

Pomasl has seen it all—from fully custom builds that look great on delivery day to fleets that quickly discover the hidden costs of one-off designs.

“Customization can be great, but it’s easy to go too far,” he explained. “Every time you add something unique, you add complexity. That can mean longer lead times, higher repair costs, and a fleet that’s never quite the same from truck to truck.”

Those small inconsistencies can snowball. Medics lose time adjusting to different layouts, maintenance teams struggle with unique parts, and training costs climb. Departments that run multiple trucks often pay for that lack of standardization in ways they don’t see until years later.

Spec’ing What Matters Most

So what does matter most? Pomasl, whose dealership sells to customers in Wisconsin, looks to Crestline’s standard features and recommends focusing on fundamentals that improve reliability and lifecycle value rather than novelty:

- Simplicity in electrical systems that keeps downtime low and reduces reliance on specialized technicians.
- Durable construction, such as all-aluminum cabinetry and body designs that hold up to years of service.
- Ease of maintenance, with consistent components and accessible parts.



- Remountability, allowing fleets to reuse a well-built module on a new chassis.
- “These are the things that help keep a

truck in service,” Pomasl said. “When you build around simplicity and repeatability, your people can focus on the mission instead of the machine.”



The Case for Standardized, Pre-Engineered Models

In recent years, manufacturers have begun to respond to that mindset by offering pre-engineered or standardized ambulance platforms. These designs aim to take the guesswork out of spec’ing while ensuring repeatable performance.

Pomasl pointed to Crestline’s CCL series, particularly the new CCL 166, as an example of that shift.

“The CCL 166 came out of real-world feedback,” he said. “It’s based on the CCL 150, which a lot of customers loved, but they wanted a little more room—more

THIS PAGE: Enhanced seating for caregivers who ride along and extra crew comes standard in the CCL 166.

storage, more working space. This new model gives them that without overcomplicating the build.”

The CCL 166 extends the module length and improves cab comfort while maintaining familiar systems and layouts across the fleet. It’s a reminder that “standardized” doesn’t mean “one-size-fits-all,” it means carefully co-ordinated functional building blocks to create a performance specification without compromise.

Listening Before Spec'ing

Pomasl’s approach to guiding customers begins with asking questions and, just as importantly, listening.

“When you let customers talk, they’ll tell you what they really need,” he said. “You learn what works and what doesn’t, and you can steer them toward a solution that fits—not just the next few months, but the next few years.”

For first-time buyers, he suggests starting with what’s already working in their current fleet, identifying pain points, and considering whether a standardized layout could improve efficiency and training consistency.

“Having the same layout across trucks builds muscle memory,” Pomasl says. “When medics jump from one truck to another, everything’s where they expect it. That’s a safety benefit as much as an operational one.”

Planning for the Future

Ultimately, choosing the right specs is less about brand loyalty and more about lifecycle thinking—building a fleet that’s consistent, serviceable, and sustainable over time.

Whether a department chooses Crestline or another manufacturer, the principles remain the same: prioritize proven systems,



Listen to the Podcast

Mike McCabe sits down with Brian MacLean, Assistant Chief of Cooper County (Missouri) Ambulance, to explore the realities of rural EMS. Serving 569 square miles in central Missouri, MacLean’s team manages thousands of calls each year—with transport times stretching up to 90 minutes since their local hospital closed.

MacLean shares why rural EMS demands sharp clinical skills, resilience, and total confidence in your equipment. He offers candid insight into fleet decisions, explaining why his agency chose Crestline ambulances for their cost-effectiveness, faster delivery, smart layout, and safety-focused design. Drawing on personal experience from an ambulance-involved crash, he underscores how vehicle design and properly secured equipment can make all the difference.

[Listen Here.](#)

plan for your future needs, and avoid reinventing the wheel with every order.

“Departments that focus on repeatable specs save money, shorten lead times, and spend more time in service,” Pomasl said. “That’s what matters for customers.”

A Smarter Way Forward

In an era when budgets are tight and downtime is costly, simplicity may be the most underrated feature an ambulance can have. Standardized, well-engineered models like the new CCL 166 and others in its class reflect a broader industry trend toward operational efficiency.

Visit CrestlineAmbulances.com to explore how the CCL 166’s standardized design delivers long-term fleet value.

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