AASI switching to new vehicles

Acadian Ambulance Service has become the first company in the nation to accept delivery of the "Olympian," a new concept in ambulances. The modular unit, manufactured by the firm which was the official supplier of ambulances for the 1980 Winter Olympics, is expected to be significantly more fuel efficient than other ambulances. Also, according to AASE officials, it has many new features which will enhance the company's life-saving capabilities.

According to Richard Zuschlag, chief operating officer of Acadian Ambulance, the all aluminum module "is designed for the fuel-efficient, down-sized engines of the 80's."

Spiraling Costs

"The effect of spiraling fuel costs has been devastating," Zuschlag said. "Our ambulances travel 1.6 million miles per year. We are engaged in a top-priority program aimed at trying to hold the effect of gasoline prices on our membership fees to a minimum. Purchase of the "Olympian" may be our most effective step thus far."

"While we are testing the fuel-saving capability of the aluminum module," Zuschlag said, "it will be stationed throughout the 12 parish service area for field evaluation by our staff. It will ultimately be used by the three-man paramedic team operating as a first-response unit. The ambulance previously used by the team will serve as a much-needed backup unit for special situations."

Among the new features of the "Olympian" is a center-mounted stretcher which allows two medics to attend to a patient at the same time. There is also a one-step hatchback overhead rear door which permits easier patient loading, unobstructed access to compartments, and greater visibility of rear warning lights. In the raised position, the hatch-back door provides a canopy effect to protect the patient from the weather.

Storage Space

Other features include increased storage space, a redesigned oxygen compartment, easier access to maintenance areas, and access to the med compartment from the driver compartment. "The driver can stop the vehicle and move directly into the med compartment if his help is needed, without going outside the ambulance and entering through the rear door," Zuschlag said. "There are circumstances where this could be extremely important to the well-being of the patient."

"The "Olympian" has a completely clear-roofline, more head room, and improved all-around visibility. "We believe this new concept will help us considerably in lessening the impact of high gasoline costs on membership fees," Zuschlag said.

Many trucking firms have been able to increase fuel efficiency by nearly 25 percent by streamlining their tractor-trailer rigs, engine modifications, use of radial tires and high-torque-engine.