

ABC Companies and Partners Offer Coach Refurbishment Program

by Larry Plachno
Photos courtesy of ABC Companies



The process of refurbishing coaches is growing in popularity since it pleases customers and extends the life and usefulness of a coach at a reasonably economical price. To meet the growing demand for refurbished coaches, ABC has partnered with several industry suppliers to provide a structured and proven refurbishing process for select coach models. Shown here is a Van Hool C2045 coach that was photographed after going through the ABC Refurb process.

In what can only be considered a major new direction for the bus industry, ABC Companies has added a comprehensive refurbishment program to their service menu for in-service coaches regardless of the quantity involved.

Bus refurbishment is nothing new and has been around for decades. Numerous transit agencies have refurbished transit bus fleets to extend their useful life. There are several

companies that are specially set up to do this type of work. However, in the intercity bus business, coach refurbishing has been limited to larger companies and substantial numbers of buses. At one time or another, Greyhound went through a refurbishing or major modification process on their 743 Yellow Coaches, on their Scenicruisers, on the MC-6 and on the MC-7 Combos. Trailways operators had Eagles refurbished at the factory in Brownsville, Texas.

What makes the new ABC procedure different is that it is available to all coach operators regardless of the size of their fleet. It also offers a list of options that will allow operators to upgrade their coaches at the same time that they are refurbished.

A Sign of the Times

In spite of the fact that this new ABC Refurbishment Program is both revolutionary and

unique, the big question is not so much “why?” but “why not?” What might be called the confluence of several recent developments suggests that coach refurbishing is not only a viable alternative but a very practical course of action at this time. Here are some of the various developments and reasons.

The Economy

Obviously heading the list is the current economy. With the economy down it is increasingly difficult for some operators to justify the cost of new coaches except for limited business segments where profitability remains high. For other business segments, refurbishing may be the logical alternative. Your passengers and customers will be pleased with an expertly refurbished coach. Some may think it is a new coach and even those who do not will appreciate your investment for their safety and comfort. In addition, the refurbishing process will allow you to upgrade your coach with various new features to increase safety and passenger amenities.

Integral Coach Long Life

As mentioned in an article in our December issue, refurbishing allows us to take advantage of the long life of integral coaches. The bus industry in the United States developed primarily as long distance scheduled service transportation. Integral coach construction, which first appeared in the 1930s, provided the durability and long life required by Greyhound and other high mileage carriers providing scheduled intercity passenger service.

This integral durability and longevity was originally built into the coach at the factory. Refurbishing typically does not change the integral structure but rather makes mechan-

This is the “before” photo. Although obviously in reasonable shape, this Van Hool C2045 is a candidate for refurbishing to extend the useful life of the coach, update the interior and install state-of-the-art systems and components.



ABC Companies is a logical partner for coach refurbishing because of their extensive background in this area. In addition to running a major refurbishing program for Greyhound coaches in Napanee, Indiana, ABC has other facilities with the right equipment and experience for doing this kind of work. Shown here is the ABC facility in Faribault, Minnesota that has done extensive refurbishing work in the past.

ical improvements to extend the life of components and makes cosmetic and other improvements to upgrade the appearance and customer appeal of the coach while also extending the useful life of the coach itself.

Movement Back to Pre-Owned Coaches

ABC’s new Coach Refurbishment Program is simply another way that our industry is moving back to pre-owned coaches. In past decades it was typical for bus companies to keep some older coaches in their fleet for those economy charters including student athletic trips and ball game charters. This changed somewhat with Deregulation in 1982 when increased competition encouraged some companies to put more emphasis on newer and more attractive coaches. This move to new coaches escalated in the 1990s when operators stood in line to purchase new 45-foot coaches.

This is the “after” photo. In addition to several new and updated systems on the interior, the refurbished C2045 now has a more modern appearance with the newer front lights and the newer Van Hool logo below the windshield.



Today, because of both the economy and the number of 45-foot coaches already on the road, the need for going with new coaches is not as urgent. For many operators, refurbished coaches represent the best of both worlds. They keep costs down while still being attractive to passengers.

Safety

Often overlooked are the tremendous safety advantages of bus refurbishing. Once your coach is in the refurbishing process, it is relatively easy to upgrade the coach with numerous features and components to increase coach safety. The most obvious would include an Iteris Lane Departure Warning System, Saucon fleet management system, a Kidde Fire Suppression System, a Smart Wave Tire Monitoring System, and even a back-up camera system.

It also gives the customer an opportunity to determine if they want to add seat belts during the refurbishing process. There are various bills pending in Congress that may help operators fund seats with seat belts provided it is structurally and economically feasible.

Less obvious, and less expensive, are replacements for several basic components that impact safety. These could include new air bellows, new drive axle stabilizers, new brake components and hoses, and new tires.

Passenger Amenities

Coach refurbishing also gives us a chance to upgrade passenger safety features and amenities. In addition to new exterior paint, passenger appeal can be enhanced with new seats or seat covers, new floor covering and new step treads. In addition, an enhanced entertainment system, 110-volt outlets and Wi-Fi bring the coach up to state-of-the-art.

Going Green

Coach refurbishing is an obvious move towards “Going Green” with your fleet. Refurbishing the engine and transmission can help reduce fuel consumption. Other new components also increase coach effi-

ciency and reduce pollution. Recycling the entire coach itself promotes "re-use" instead of "replace." Hence, coach refurbishing is an obvious move if you want to impress your passengers by "Going Green" with your fleet.

Greyhound Refurbishing at Nappanee

I would certainly be remiss if I did not include the influence of the Greyhound refurbishing contract at Nappanee, Indiana as a factor in this new ABC refurbishing program. The cover article in our November issue of NATIONAL BUS TRADER reported on the refurbishing at Nappanee in detail. While the Nappanee program is limited to Greyhound, numerous people commented on the quality and thoroughness of the ABC staff and procedures. It was not too much of a jump from an exclusive Greyhound program to developing a workable coach refurbishing program for other bus companies, equipment types and manufacturers.

The Procedure

Coach refurbishing is nothing new at ABC. As far back as the early 1980s, ABC was doing refurbished coaches for me for my Wisconsin Illinois Stages operation. While the procedure back then was not as elaborate as what ABC is doing today, those coaches ran well and I had passengers who thought they were new. In subsequent years, ABC did some extensive transit bus refurbishing at their facility in Faribault, Minnesota and some coach refurbishing. Their current facility in Nappanee shows that ABC has the experience to develop a procedure and technique to make coach refurbishing work.



Another "before" photo shows a C2045 coach recently removed from service to be sent through the refurbishing process. While the coach is still in reasonable shape, it is an excellent candidate for the ABC refurbishing and updating process.

Before accepting coaches for refurbishing, ABC will first develop a set of standard and optional procedures for each model. The first refurbishing procedure will be developed for the Van Hool model C2045. Once this is up and underway, the second procedure will most likely be developed for the Van Hool model T2145. From here, additional procedures will be developed for different models as customer needs dictate.



This "after" photo shows what refurbishing can do in regard to updating and modernizing a coach. In this situation the modernized appearance is obvious. Also note the installation of a rear window to please customers and modernize the coach.

Smaller refurbishing orders will initially be handled at the ABC facilities in Faribault, Minnesota and Winter Garden, Florida. Both of these locations have substantial experience in these areas along with skilled staff and professional equipment. As volume increases, refurbishing work will go to other ABC locations or to an additional facility in Nappanee, Indiana.

Unlike the Greyhound refurbishing in Nappanee, this new program will have several options depending on your refurbishing needs. There are also plans to develop a minimal set of procedures that would qualify to re-designate a C2045 coach as a C2045R.

For the C2045, the standard refurbishing procedure will start with a 50 point mechanical inspection. It then continues with several mechanical item choices including new unitized wheel bearings all around, new front independent suspension bushings, new tag axle independent suspension bushings, new air bellows, drive axle upper stabilizers, a new A/C compressor, a new radiator, new CAC, new tires, new brake chambers and hoses, a new air dryer, new batteries and new dual 140-amp alternators.

Internally, both the driver and passengers will get seats with three-point belts, a back-up camera system will be provided and an AM-FM DVD entertainment system with six monitors will be installed. Both the Series 60 engine and the Allison B500 transmission will be refurbished and reinstalled. Body work will include new look front headlight caps, new LED side turn lights, a new LED tail light package, reworked baggage door linkage as needed and new step treads.

The reason coach owners turn to ABC for coach refurbishing is because the company has the expertise, experience and equipment to do the job properly. Here, one of the technicians on the ABC refurb staff checks out the status of the engine and engine compartment of a coach coming into the problem. The ABC coach refurbishing program offers several options for coach owners.





This shows the engine compartment of a coach coming in for refurbishing. Options include rebuilding both the engine and transmission as well as replacing or refurbishing other engine compartment components.



This photo shows a C2045 partially through the refurbishing process. Much of the engine compartment has been updated with new components. Next, a newly rebuilt engine will be installed to complete the process.

Finally, the coach will be given a new two-color paint scheme. Bus operators can also take the opportunity to have exterior graphics upgraded or changed thereby highlighting their newly improved equipment and also their company image.

Based on customer requests, a list of additional options will be available. These include an enhanced 50-point mechanical inspection, 110-volt power outlets, Wi-Fi, contoured parcel racks, new floor covering, and an in-seat audio system. Several new components or systems will also be optional including wheelchair lift installation, a fuel saver drivetrain package, a lane departure warning system, Saucan, a Kidde Fire Suppression system, a Smart Wave tire monitoring system and a rear window cap.

Refurbishing Suppliers

Several leading industry suppliers have partnered with ABC Companies in this new refurbishing program. This gives refurbishing customers the opportunity to upgrade and modernize their coaches during this

refurbishment process. From the standpoint of the passenger and customer, coach appearance and amenities may be more important than coach age. By adding features and amenities during the refurbishing process, this coach could end up being more popular than newer coaches in your fleet.

Here are some insights and comments from a few of ABC's partners involved in this new refurbishing program.

A rebuilt Allison transmission using state-of-the-art components increases fuel efficiency as well as provides a warranty. Chato D. Patterson of Allison Transmission says: "Allison Transmission is the world leader in designing, manufacturing and marketing fully automatic transmissions for commercial applications. Allison Bus Series fully automatic transmissions help keep customer vehicles and business on schedule with maximum operating economies, improved vehicle performance and better passenger comfort.

"Genuine Allison ReTran® automatic transmissions are meticulously remanufac-

tured to precise factory tolerances with original and new, improved Allison parts. Factory-trained technicians using Allison-approved technologies and manufacturing processes literally remake a genuine Allison transmission from the ground up. Genuine Allison ReTran automatic transmissions come with a two-year, unlimited mileage worldwide warranty and are supported by the same service network that stands behind every new Allison Automatic."

A new coat of paint makes a coach look younger and increases customer appeal. Michael O'Donnell from Dupont Paints comments on the existing ABC refurbishing program in Nappanee, Indiana. "The Nappanee program has been a great partnership with ABC. They are putting out a fantastic product using a combination of talented painters and the right paint.

"In recent years, there have been a lot of 'white' buses with minimal graphics. A colorful base coat with good graphics demonstrates real commitment on the part of the operator and makes the bus look like new, for a long time."

Photographed during the refurbishing process, this particular coach arrived with painted steel wheels and older tires.



The installation of Alcoa Aluminum Dura-Bright wheels and new Goodyear tires adds a great deal to the overall appearance of the coach.





The dash and entertainment systems on this arriving coach were marked for improvement and updating.

The full-service graphics department in ABC's Winter Garden, Florida location designed, supplied, produced and installed the graphics on the refurbished coach in ABC's booth at the UMA Expo in Tampa. The 3M materials were provided by Tubelite – who provides materials as well as technical support for ABC Florida's digital printers and cutters.

Going with Alcoa aluminum wheels offers several advantages according to Brian E. Thomas of Alcoa Wheel and Transportation Products. "Alcoa aluminum wheels are

The ABC staff is not only experienced in coach rebuilding but they have the equipment to do things properly. Here, the wheels and tires on a coach being refurbished are being removed and replaced.



The refurbishing process includes both modernized and enhanced entertainment systems as well as an updated dash appearance. Note the installation of a new DVD player.

lighter, stronger and more durable to improve vehicle performance. A lighter wheel increases fuel economy while a stronger, more durable Alcoa aluminum wheel reduces the risk of curbing damage and failure. In addition, Alcoa Dura-Bright® wheels (for this project) clean easily with mild soap and water, reducing maintenance costs and improving the appearance of the vehicle. All Alcoa aluminum wheels also improve ride quality, extend tire and brake life and increase resale value."

Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company provided eight Goodyear 315/80 R22.5J tires for ABC's refurbished bus at the UMA Expo.

Installing replacement LED lighting during the refurbishing process is a smart move according to Brent Mosier of Hella Automotive Lighting. "Using LEDs on refurb/retrofitted buses saves current. Batteries and alternators live longer, and once installed, the LED lights often last the life of the bus. They do both internal and external lighting. Replacing old style assemblies with current ones makes your coach look like new."

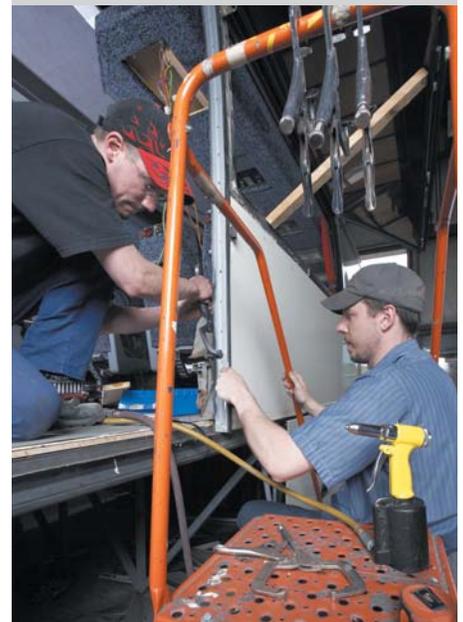
The C2045 on display in ABC's booth at the UMA Expo will feature a new set of Amaya Torino seats with three-point belts. Amays is currently offering a full range of seats with seat belt options to our industry.

The experts will tell you that updating your seats with new seat covers and modern fabrics is more important than replacing the seats. Dan Wagner from Wagner Associates, representing Holdsworth fabric, offers the following insights. "To begin with, the interior of a coach is a business presentation to the customer. What the customers see and feel while they are on board a bus is largely determined

by the condition, feel and appearance of the seats and other interior components they will look at during their travel time. If the material is worn and tattered or if the color and design of the fabrics seem outdated, the passengers will notice and form opinions about the service they are paying for.

"This is because fabrics are fashion items in the same way that clothing and home interiors are viewed. Painting the walls in your kitchen will not have near the affect as changing the cabinets and countertops in

Numerous optional procedures and systems are possible during the refurbishing process. Doors and wheelchair lifts can be refurbished while new features such as entertainment systems can be installed.





Since more and more passengers are walking on board your coach with laptop computers, installing 110-volt outlets and WiFi during the refurbishing process is an obvious option.



Your coach can also be modernized and upgraded with new systems and equipment. Shown here is a new Saucan fleet management system but numerous other items are available.

making the kitchen look more modern. The same is true with coach interiors.

“Changing out the interior fabrics when refurbishing a coach not only gives the coach a fresh, modern appearance, it is also very cost effective. When you weigh the costs of replacing buses versus refurbishing, upgrading the interiors is certainly a better bang for the buck. Most customers do not know and probably do not care in what year a particular bus was built. What they will remember though are the impressions and visual memories they developed while riding on that coach.

“When you consider that the cost of seats and fabric are less than one percent of the cost of the bus yet they form 90 percent of the customers’ opinions of that bus and the service they are being given, it does not pay an operator to use cheap fabrics or overlook the need to keep their interiors fresh and new. Therefore, upgrading and updating coach interiors becomes a very cost effective way of improving the customers’ overall experience.”

Onboard entertainment systems are increasingly important to passengers. Ken Lokey of KVH said that they are experiencing a boost in sales to folks refurbishing existing buses to gain a competitive edge. He says, “Passenger entertainment, in any mode of transportation, is becoming more important as the technology becomes available. Just like the airlines have taken to satellite TV and Wi-Fi, so has the passenger bus industry. I see this technology trend continuing, especially for the longer trips being offered. Live satellite TV makes the trip experience much more enjoyable and the customers will thank you for it.

“It is possible to install this system using your own people but most opt for professional installation, as part of a refurb, because installation requires meticulous attention to detail.”

Kathy Kirstine of REI emphasizes the importance of an onboard entertainment sys-

tem. “Using REI’s factory original equipment when refurbishing your motorcoach not only provides a fresh new look but also maintains the A/V Systems integrity and performance. REI offers options for operators and the various older coaches in their fleets that include: plug and play DVD Kits and CD/MP3 radios, 10.2-inch LCD retrofit kits, and 15.4-inch LCD upgrade kits. Each is designed to replace existing CRT monitors per the year, make and model of the coach. REI also offers faceplates and LED bulb replacements for System 2000 Control Heads which ultimately help them look brand new. Simply stated, REI gives new life to your coaches.”

When talking about modernizing a coach, it is important to consider the fact that an increasing number of passengers are bringing their own entertainment on board in the form of a laptop computer or an iPod. They are looking for the bus to supply power for their equipment. Doug Adams from Vanner, Inc. comments on that. “Vanner inverters and inverter/chargers safely provide power to the coach seats for your customers’ convenience. The system can also be designed to

distribute AC power for onboard electronics including TVs, DVDs, stereos, etc.

“Proper installation is critical to safety. It is best left to the professionals and refurbishing professionals. It is also worth noting that some states include these systems in their inspections, and if the operator can not show that they are installed correctly, the bus fails inspection.”

In addition to the “green” benefits operators derive from refurbishing their vehicles, the very process of refurbishment at ABC Companies is in itself a “green practice.” Recycling is a priority at ABC Companies and they are focused on recycling as many of the discarded materials and components as possible through contracted recyclers.

ABC Companies will be offering more information on their new Coach Refurbishing program at the forthcoming UMA Motorcoach Expo in Tampa. Additional information is also available from your ABC sales representative. □



Very popular options during the refurbishing process are new seats, new seat covers and seat belts. Seat belts will keep an older coach viable and on par with the newer coaches in your fleet. New seats or at least new seat covers not only give your coach a modern appearance but it usually also makes your coach smell new.

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