

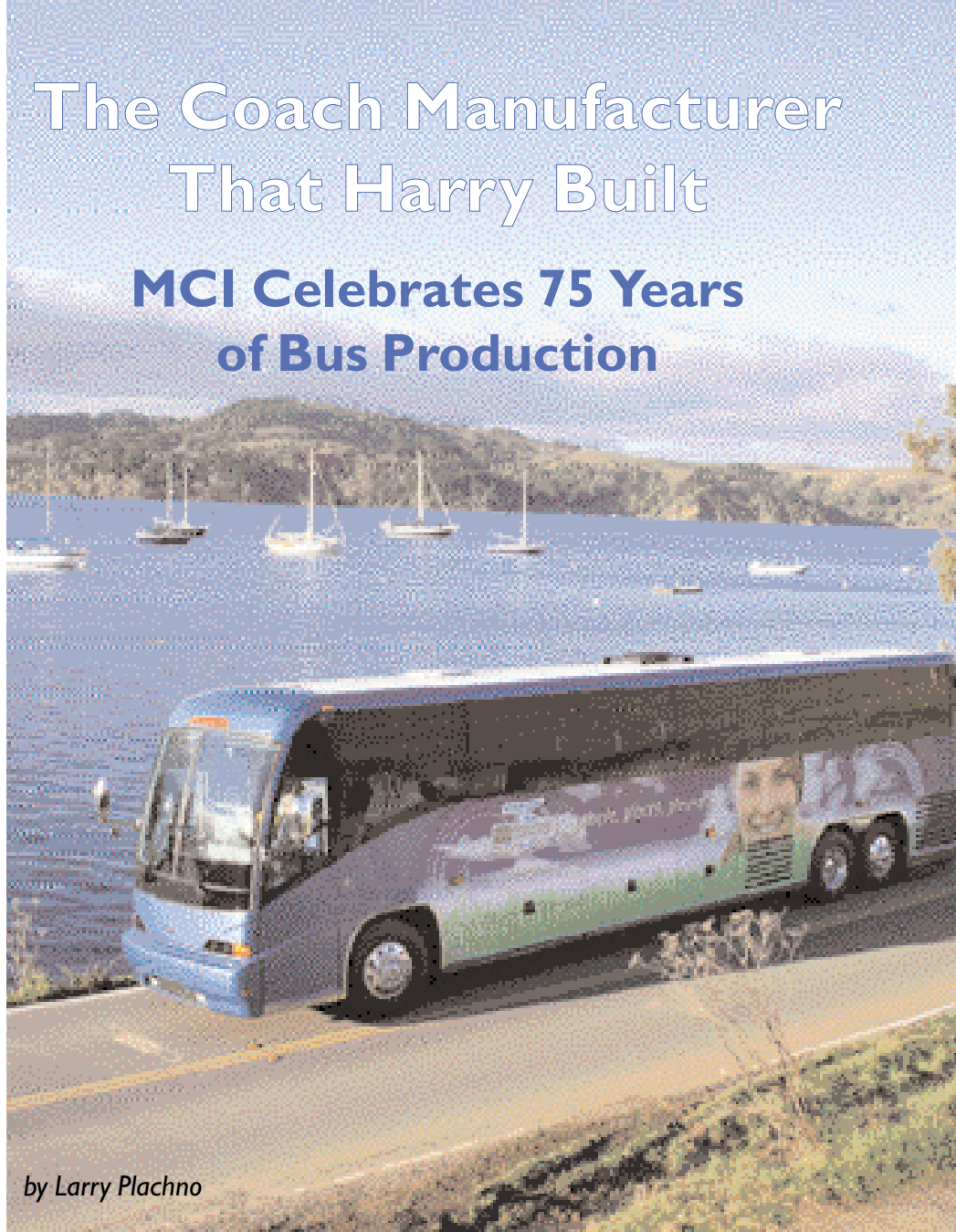
This year of 2008 marks a special anniversary for Motor Coach Industries. It was exactly 75 years ago that the company produced its first bus. We have already told this fascinating story from the standpoint of model progression. The most noteworthy articles including the MCI MC-1 to MC-12 series in the August, 2000 issue of NATIONAL BUS TRADER and the MCI A to J models in the April, 2001 issue of NATIONAL BUS TRADER. We also covered the MCI story from the standpoint of production facilities in the October, 2003 issue of NATIONAL BUS TRADER.

Now, we plan to look at MCI history from a different perspective. How does a garage in Winnipeg grow to become the most popular builder of intercity coaches in the United States and Canada and the builder of the most durable, and considered by many to be the most reliable buses in the world? The answer to this is that there was a long chain of circumstances and incidents over many years that moved MCI in this direction. Had any one of them been different or missing, the end result might have been vastly different.



The story of MCI, at least for its initial four decades, is also the story of Harry Zoltok. In many respects, I feel that Harry Zoltok has been vastly underrated by bus industry historians. With the possible exception of Yellow Coach/General Motors, no other intercity coach builder captured this much of the market. While companies other than MCI could claim to have excellent staff to support their management, at MCI Harry wore several hats including founder, manager, head of production and engineer. While other bus manufacturers had some remarkable key people, none of them could claim as many different responsibilities as Harry or could claim to match his success.

Harry Zoltok was born in Poland in 1904. Unfortunately, we have not been able to locate any information on his education or background. However, it is obvious that Harry either had some engineering experience or training plus some tremendous native ability in this area. We do know that, like many other people, Harry became unhappy with the situation in Poland. In addition to floods and disease, Poland is somewhat of the crossroads of



by Larry Plachno

Appropriately, MCI offers a 75th Anniversary Edition coach to commemorate this special event. This special J4500 model offers seating for 50 passengers plus a Cummins ISM engine and a ZF AS Tronic 12-speed transmission. It was photographed at Drake's Bay at the Point Reyes National Sea Shore in northern California. ROBERT FERRONE PHOTO.

Europe and was faced with problems from larger powers.

He was still relatively young when Harry left Poland after World War I and made his way to Danzig. Here he ran into several other Poles immigrating to New York and decided to join them. According to one historian, Harry did not have the necessary papers so he stowed away under some hides on the boat. While his sea voyage was both hungry and uncomfortable, he arrived in New York full of hope but penniless.

From New York, Harry made his way to Montreal in Canada where his engineering ability was sufficient to get him some temporary jobs and put some money into his

pocket. From here, he decided to move west in Canada.

Harry arrived in Winnipeg in 1928 at the age of 24. The story he later told was that he walked down Portage Avenue and was so impressed with its size and cleanliness that he elected to stay. He soon got a job with J.R. Horne and Company, an automotive body repair business, and stayed working for them for four years.

In spite of the depression, Harry wanted to have his own business. He convinced some associates to invest in a new company known as the Fort Garry Motor Body and Paint Works, Ltd. Fred Sicinski served as president while Harry Zoltok was the vice



The Fort Garry Motor Body and Paint Works delivered its first bus in 1933. Built on a Packard chassis, it offered seating for 11 passengers and was operated on a route from Winnipeg to Saskatoon. MCI.



The early history of MCI is also the story of Harry Zoltok who founded the company and then expanded it from a small regional bus builder into the most popular intercity coach in the U.S. and Canada. MCI.

president. The new company was founded in 1932 and was housed in a 5,000-square foot facility on Fort Street in Winnipeg. Initial plans were for the company to concentrate on auto body repairs, custom built car bodies, and automotive painting.

Only a year later, in 1933, the company had an opportunity to build its first bus. Starting what would become a company tradition, Harry sketched out plans for the new vehicle in chalk on the company floor. This same scenario would often be repeated in the following years for new buses and parts. The engineering and production staff were then faced with the necessity of designing and building the part or assembly quicker than the feet of those passing by erased the chalk marks.

This first bus was a stretched body on a Packard chassis that seated 11 people. Typical of that era, there were four rows of seats with individual doors for each row. Hence, the overall design was fairly similar to some modern limousines. From there the company went on to design and build larger buses on truck chassis.

Zoltok's major bus competitor at this time was another Winnipeg company known as Western Auto and Truck Body Works, builder of "Western Flyer" buses. In a decision that would push the company in the right direction, Zoltok elected to move towards heavy-duty, durable integral buses while the Western Flyer buses at this time were still body-on-chassis. The body-on-chassis buses were less expensive but Zoltok's buses were more durable. Fort Garry turned out their first integral coach for Grey Goose Bus Lines in 1937 and became one of the first compa-

nies other than Yellow Coach/General Motors to offer integral construction.

The eventual growth and success of the Fort Garry company was largely based on its relationship with what became Canadian Greyhound Lines. All of that hinged on a 1935 decision by Barney Olson to incorporate Trans Continental Coach Lines, Limited in Manitoba late that year. Based in Win-

nipeg, that company grew to become a major bus operator in Manitoba and was soon brought into the Greyhound fold. Due to this new company and its location in Winnipeg, Barney Olson became acquainted with Harry Zoltok.

As a result, 1937 became an important year for the company since it marked the start of the relationship between Canadian

Obviously a natural engineer, Harry Zoltok developed a manufacturing process for MCI that was different from other bus builders and produced the most durable buses in the world. Today's D model MCI coaches are still built using some of Harry's ideas. Probably taken in the later 1950s, this photo shows production at the old St. Matthews Street plant which was the center of coach production in those years. MCI.



Greyhound Lines and Zoltok's company. Greyhound was operating several 1930 model "Y" Yellow Coach buses that were now nearing the end of their useful life. In addition to the age of the engines, the bodies were starting to fall apart. The Fort Garry Motor Body and Paint Works was awarded a contract from Greyhound to work on some of the better units. The bodies were rebuilt and somewhat streamlined while rebuilt engines were installed.

By this time, Greyhound in the United States was already operating the Yellow Coach 719 and 743 Super Coach models. With all of the production going to Greyhound, the Canadian operators had to be content with the Yellow Coach model 732, which was less streamlined and less advanced. Greyhound in Canada purchased four in late 1936 and they proved to be a disappointment. They were too heavy, they were incapable of dealing with the harsh Canadian weather and road conditions, and the engines started giving up. They were returned to Yellow Coach in April of 1937.

At this point the Canadian Greyhound people turned to Fort Garry Auto Body and Paint Works for help. They wanted Harry Zoltok to design a bus that would be larger than previous buses and capable of carrying 37 passengers, that could deal with the rigors of Canadian weather and road conditions, and that had many of the features and some of the appearance but none of the shortcomings of the 743 Yellow Coach Super Coach. Harry agreed to produce such a vehicle.

This partnership between Fort Garry Auto Body and Paint Works and Greyhound



This photo shows one of the Courier models being built in the 1950s. It was undoubtedly taken on the production line at the St. Matthews Street facility which became known as Plant 1. Coach production continued here until 1968 when it was moved to the new Fort Garry Plant which was geared for the longer 40-foot coaches. This plant is still active today producing component parts. MCI.

of Canada would be a major move forward for both companies. The additional sales would help Zoltok's company expand and improve its product. Greyhound of Canada would get buses suited to its operating needs. With all due respect to my Canadian friends, the weather, operating conditions, and state of Canadian roads in the late 1930s was essentially the ultimate challenge for

bus builders. Any bus that could operate safely, reliably and economically in this environment would be a winner anywhere else.

The Greyhound people provided Harry Zoltok with information on the advantages and shortcomings of the Yellow 743 Super Coach. What resulted was the model 37-UM. In September of 1938, Trans Continental placed an order for two at \$15,000 each. This was followed by an order from Central Greyhound for four more at \$15,600 each in November of 1938. While these buses were a tremendous step forward, they were still body-on-chassis and had an underfloor Hall-Scott pancake engine.

To Harry's credit, these buses were hardly out of the door when he again picked up his piece of chalk and began designing an improved coach that came to be called the model 150. This was somewhat patterned after the new Yellow Coach PDG series with silversiding in the United States. Noteworthy improvements included lower weight through increased use of aluminum, a move towards integral construction, and a new heating and cooling system. Previous buses used five or six small heaters scattered throughout the bus interior. The new 150 went to the modern system of using vents to distribute heat around the coach, and the system could be used for cool air in the summer. Canadian Greyhound immediately placed an order for 10 of these coaches.

This obvious success prompted Sicinski and Zoltok to take action in 1940 to deal with

Built in the 1950s, Harry Zoltok's Courier models were a hit with Greyhound of Canada and brought the company to the attention of Greyhound in the United States. By today's standards the Courier models were short and rounded in design but were durable enough to survive the Canadian winters and early roads. This Courier 95 was operated by SMT Eastern Limited in New Brunswick.
ROBERT REDDEN, REDDEN ARCHIVES.



the growing business. The company was recapitalized and renamed Motor Coach Industries. It also moved to a larger, 20,000-square foot facility at Erin and St. Matthews streets that came to be called Plant 1 and served as the company's primary facility for 25 years. Bus production was drastically curtailed during the war years when the MCI facility concentrated on producing military vehicles. When bus production resumed, MCI was still a small bus builder. As late as 1947, MCI was producing one new coach every two weeks – only about 25 or 26 coaches each year.

The relationship between Canadian Greyhound and MCI grew stronger during the 1940s. In 1940 the company operated 67 vehicles, primarily old Yellow Coaches, Kenworths and Hayes-Anderson buses with only 17 newer MCI coaches. By 1950, Canadian Greyhound was operating 129 coaches, all of which were MCIs. In 1948, the board of directors of Greyhound of Canada entered into an agreement to purchase a 65 percent interest in MCI. Sicinski retired and was replaced by Harry Zoltok as president of MCI. By 1950, MCI had two plants in operation, each capable of producing one coach each week.

What could be called the last of the incidents or coincidents that catapulted MCI into the leading industry position came in 1956 when the U.S. Department of Justice



The popular "MC" series started with the prototype MC-1 that emerged in 1958. Tradition at MCI holds that Harry Zoltok put a lot of effort into these early "MC" models to bring them to the level of durability, reliability and economy of operation required by Greyhound lines. The "MC" series would continue in production for decades and would become the most popular intercity coach in the United States and Canada. NBT.

filed an antitrust suit against GMC buses naming GM and three other companies. In particular, the complaint charged that GM had built 84 percent of all the buses (both intercity and transit) sold in the United States in 1955 and Flxible had built another seven

percent – leaving only nine percent for all the other builders.

There are numerous comments and side issues on this topic. One of the most obvious being that GM's huge market share was at least partially due to the quality of their products, support, and financing. GM's PD4104 was revolutionary and easily beyond any other coach on the market at that time. However, the two important points are that this broke GM's stride and caused them to eventually leave the bus business, and it prompted Greyhound Lines in the United States to look for another coach supplier.

Greyhound did put off buying more GM coaches for two years, possibly eliminating the possibility of additional Scenicruisers. Meanwhile, things started happening in Canada. September of 1957 saw the official creation of a Greyhound Lines of Canada. One month earlier, arrangements were made to acquire the remaining shares of MCI stock owned by Harry Zoltok. Hence, MCI became wholly owned by Greyhound. Thereafter, until his retirement in 1971, Harry Zoltok typically served as the president of MCI and vice president of equipment for Greyhound Lines of Canada.

Greyhound Lines in the United States did buy more GM coaches for a few years – more PD4104s, some PD4106s and a few PD4107s. Meanwhile, back in Winnipeg, Harry was putting a lot of chalk on the floor. The old "Courier" line of MCI coaches was effectively being discontinued and replaced with the new MC series. The prototype MC-1 emerged in 1958 and went into production in 1959. For the next few years,

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Commemorating this special event for MCI, their J4500 Anniversary Edition represents the cutting edge of technology and passenger amenities. Fifty passengers ride in Amaya Torino VIP seats with designer inserts and leather piping. In keeping with modern technology and passenger needs, the coach has a GPS navigation system, WiFi enabled Internet and 110-volt outlets throughout the cabin. The entertainment system includes a Blaupunkt Pro-Line and iPod compatibility, 15-inch LCD monitors and satellite TV. Safety has not been forgotten since the coach is also equipped with a tire monitoring system and two-view back-up camera.



MCI came out with a new model every year or two. In some cases, MCI was working on a prototype on a following model before regular production started on the current model. Many of the coaches went to Greyhound Lines of Canada, which provided MCI with excellent feedback on components and modifications.

With regular production of the MC-5 in 1964, the new plant in Pembina, North Dakota was opened for finishing coaches and sales began in the United States. Following years saw the introduction of the MC-5A, MC-7 and MC-8 on the U.S. market. GM sales declined, MCI sales increased and before long GM had discontinued building buses while MCI took over most of the intercity coach market in the United States and Canada.

As expected, any coach that could do what Greyhound Lines of Canada wanted became an immediate success in the United

States. Harry Zoltok had every reason to be proud of the coach manufacturer he had built. Harry's production technique combined with the use of stainless steel made these coaches the most durable in the world. By the 1970s they had also become the most popular intercity coaches in the United States and Canada. This, in turn, suggests that they were also the most reliable buses on the market.

Greyhound Corp. decided to move out of the transportation business. An announcement in December of 1986 indicated that Greyhound Lines would be sold to an investor group. The holding company changed its name to Greyhound-Dial, Dial and then Viad to distance itself from the running dog. MCI, as well as other companies in the Greyhound Transportation Manufacturing group, were spun off in 1993 as an autonomous corporation known as Motor Coach Industries International. A year later,

MCI became affiliated with Grupo Dina of Mexico.

The Harry Zoltok brand of platform integral design first emerged in 1937. It was perfected in the late 1940s and early 1950s and standardized with the new MC series in the 1960s. It remained standard manufacturing procedure at MCI through and including the "D" models.

It was in 1997, 60 years after Harry Zoltok introduced platform integral design at the Fort Garry Motor Body and Paint Works, that MCI began to move in a different direction. The need to move into modern times and modern components prompted the MCI engineers to use web frame integral construction for the new "E" Renaissance model. Subsequent models, including the popular J4500, also have moved to web frame integral construction.

In June of 1999, MCI was acquired by its current majority owners, JLL Partners (Joseph, Littlejohn & Levy), a leading private investment firm. In 2003, MCI invested US \$40 million to expand and rebuild its Winnipeg plant to concentrate most production in one area. With the exception of finishing the "D" series coaches in Pembina, North Dakota, all production has now returned to Winnipeg where it originally started under Harry Zoltok.

Few other manufacturing companies can look back to a personality like Harry Zoltok who was so instrumental in forming and molding the company in its formative years. Harry accepted the challenge to build a coach that was durable, reliable and met the needs of the operator. MCI continues with that tradition today. □



Regular production of the MC-9 model started in 1979. The first coach down the assembly line went to John Mancibo's All-state Charter Lines in Fresno, California. The MC-9 went on to become the most popular 40-foot intercity coach model in the United States and Canada. MCI.