

Recently, we have had an increase in inquiries about various types of conventions, trade shows, gatherings and events. Some people from companies are asking about the most appropriate places to show off their products and services. At the same time we have individuals asking about which events to attend as a buyer, to meet bus people, or just have fun. This may well be a good sign that our economy is picking up and that more people are interested in buying, selling and traveling.

When I mentioned to our staff that we did such an article some years ago, they responded that it was not in recent memory. Hence, it appears time to update and put together a list for our readers on what is going on out there and what event options are available. Many of these events are mentioned in the "Down the Road" column of coming events in NATIONAL BUS TRADER although we are including some that are generally not included. The following is what we came up with. We acknowledge in advance that this list is incomplete in that we have probably left out some events or have not included enough information on others. We welcome additional input from readers.

Domestic Commercial Shows

- **UMA Motorcoach Expo** – Originally founded in 1984 at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville, the United Motorcoach Association's annual Motorcoach Expo has become the most important gathering for the private operators of big coaches. Locations vary from year to year and are usually in warm climates in the United States so that golf can be included. Recent events have been scheduled in January or February. Their 2011 event was held in Tampa, Florida, while the 2012 event is scheduled to take place in Long Beach, California on February 8-12, 2012.

Vehicles on display are typically over-the-road coaches for private operators although smaller bus builders will also exhibit and transit, commuter and converted coaches are occasionally seen. There are numerous booths for other industry suppliers. The actual show floor is usually open three days starting with an evening preview on the first day, it is open all day on the second day, and open a half day on the third day. In addition to the displays, the event includes seminars and information sessions for commercial bus operators. There is also an evening reception as well as an awards dinner. Other organizations sometimes schedule their meetings in conjunction with the UMA Motorcoach Expo. For information go to: www.motorcoachexpo.com.

- **Bus Con** – Celebrating 15 years in 2010, Bus Con was founded by Bobit Business Media, publishers of *Metro* and *School Bus Fleet*. Scheduled annually, Bus Con filled a much needed gap by concentrating on

Conventions, Trade Shows, Gatherings and Events



by Larry Plachno

Photos by author unless otherwise indicated

Numerous different kinds of bus conventions and trade shows are scheduled every year. Each is unique in catering to different attendees and different exhibitors. Shown here, the Las Vegas Convention Center was the location for the United Motorcoach Association's Expo in 2010.

mid-size buses of all types. While the majority of the buses on display are cutaway mid-size body-on-chassis buses, there are also smaller vehicles such as vans and station wagons as well as larger transit buses and intercity coaches. Both handicap-compliant and alternate energy vehicles (hybrid and natural gas) vehicles have been popular in recent years. Attendees cover an extremely wide range from paratransit operators to city transit to limousine operators to small and private bus operators and even large coach operators.

In recent years the event has been located at Navy Pier in Chicago, presumably because many of the small bus manufacturers are located in and around northern Indiana. The 2011 event is scheduled for September 13 and 14. On the one hand, Bus Con is the largest annual domestic bus show with the highest number of vehicles on display. On the other hand, it is also one of the shortest shows with the exhibit hall typically open from noon to 5 p.m. on the first day and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the second day. Other activities include a wel-

come reception, typically some type of social event on the night of the first day, and seminars of current interest to the industry. See www.busconexpo.com for more information.

- **American Public Transit Association EXPO** – The American Public Transit Association is the primary organization in the United States for public transit agencies. While APTA has annual meetings and other gatherings, their Expo trade show is scheduled only every three years. It is billed as the “Must attend triennial event in the public transit industry.”

The APTA Expo is easily the largest event of its type in the United States and Canada. The 2011 event is expected to have at least 750 exhibitors and more than 17,000 attendees. However, it should be noted that while this event concentrates on the transit business, it also extends beyond buses to subway systems and other types of rail operations including track equipment and signaling.

Exhibitors from the bus industry will include manufacturers of city transit buses, mid-size and paratransit buses, and commuter coaches. In addition, there are numerous supplier booths involving any number of transit supplies including fare collection, destination signs, computer software and a long list of other items. The next APTA EXPO will take place on October 3-5, 2011 at the Ernest Morial Convention Center in New Orleans. Two huge halls are dedicated to the event. For additional information see www.aptaexpo.com.



While the majority of buses on display at Bus Con are of the mid-size cutaway design, you will also find vans, transit buses and full-size coaches on display. Attendees include a very wide range of bus owners and operators including private operations, transit agencies and even coach operators. This photo was taken at the 2007 Bus Con at Navy Pier in Chicago.

- **Ontario Transportation Expo Trade Show** – The Ontario Motor Coach Association in conjunction with the Ontario School Bus Association and Ontario Public Transit Association hosts the OTE Trade Show also known as the Ontario Transportation Expo. It is billed as the only trade show of its kind, combining school bus, motorcoach, public transit and specialized industries in one location under one roof. In addition to manufacturers, other attendees and exhibitors

include consultants, parts suppliers and various services from all of these industries.

Beyond the trade show and exhibits, the event includes more than 30 workshops and networking opportunities. The 2011 event was scheduled for April 10-13 in Toronto. For additional information visit the OTE Website at www.ote.ca.

Associations

There are bus associations that have annual meetings. Some of these meetings include various informative or educational sessions as well as industry supplier displays. Participation in many or all events may be restricted to members. Hence, if you are not a member it would be wise to inquire about membership or requirements for attending an event prior to making plans.

- **Trailways** – The Trailways organization was formed on February 5, 1936 when the managers of five independent bus companies decided to band together for mutual interline passenger support to meet the competition of big, national operations. Today, more than 3,000 vehicles carry the Trailways banner. There are 88 bus operator member companies with 25 still offering scheduled service.

This year the Trailways Annual Stockholders Meeting and Conference was held from February 27 to March 2, 2011 in Scottsdale, Arizona. Expectedly, a major topic at this event was the 75th Anniversary of Trailways. Activities include business meetings, various meals, and both outdoor and indoor exhibits by supplier members. This year's

The Motorcoach Expo of the United Motorcoach Association is the largest show catering to large coaches and private motorcoach operators. Exhibits include both coach displays as well as supplier booths. This view of the REI exhibit with an MCI coach was taken at the UMA Motorcoach Expo in San Francisco.



event challenged attendees to come dressed to one event as the tackiest tourist they have ever seen. As of press time, no date or location has been set for 2012. For information go to www.trailways.com.

- **Gray Line** – Gray Line is an international association of bus operators who specialize in high quality sightseeing tours. Many of the members are involved with other types of bus operations. For information go to www.grayline.com.

- **IMG** – The International Motor Coach Group is an association of bus companies throughout North America who work to achieve higher guidelines in safety, service and quality. Meetings include vendors as well as members. In 2011, IMG will be co-conferencing with ABA in Dallas and with UMA in 2012. There is also a Strategic Alliance Meeting in Lancaster, Pennsylvania from August 10-12, 2011. For information go to www.imgcoach.com.

Foreign Commercial Shows

While the most durable buses in the world are manufactured and operated in the United States and Canada, the bus industry here is tiny and somewhat provincial. The United States and Canada are credited with only one percent of the world bus market. In much of the rest of the world, most of the major bus shows are organized under the Busworld name. Many years ago I looked at foreign shows as being somewhat un-American. However, anyone involved in the industry eventually realizes that most of the bus industry is located overseas.

Busworld was initially organized by the bus operators association in Belgium who felt a need for a bus trade show. The location picked was the city of Kortrijk in southwest Belgium not far from France. In following years, the Busworld show in Kortrijk grew to become the most important bus show in the world.

Due in large part to compliments and praise from both exhibitors and attendees, starting in about 2000 Busworld began to expand into other major bus markets with additional shows in other countries. While the show in China is scheduled annually, the other Busworld shows are typically scheduled every two years.

As a general rule, the Busworld shows include a mixture of all kinds of buses including transit buses, mid-size buses and motorcoaches. Other exhibitors include a wide range of suppliers from components and parts to support and services. There is usually also a tourism component. Typically, local manufactures predominate at the local shows although major manufacturers and suppliers will exhibit at numerous shows.



Several bus organizations have annual meetings or conventions with many of the activities limited to members. This photo shows a recent Trailways convention. It included both indoor and outdoor events. ROBERT BEARD.

- **Busworld Kortrijk** – Scheduled every two years in Kortrijk, Belgium, Busworld Kortrijk is considered to be the largest, most important and most influential bus show in the world. The 2009 event included 389 exhibitors with 70 coach builders and 319 suppliers exhibiting in eight large halls and connecting areas. There were approximately 28,000 attendees from 110 countries. On display are virtually all buses available in Europe ranging from vans to mid-size buses to transit buses and motorcoaches.

The event typically runs for a week. Included are two days for the press, one day for the public and remaining days for bus owners and operators. In addition to the displays there are various meetings and events as well as a range of special awards and presentations including Coach of the Year and Manufacturer of the Year. There are even coaches available for test drives.

The good news is that virtually all of the exhibitors speak English. Many have liter-

Held every two years, the Busworld show in Kortrijk, Belgium is usually considered the most important bus show in the world. This photo was taken at a corner of the large Van Hool display at the 2009 event. No, the photo is not backwards. This coach was built with a right hand drive because it was ordered by an operator in England.



ature available in several languages including English. The bad news is that local hotel accommodations are difficult to get in Kortrijk while Busworld is scheduled. Since local railroad service is excellent, many exhibitors and attendees stay in Gent, Brugge or Brussels, Belgium or even in nearby Lille, France. Dates for 2011, the 21st Busworld in Kortrijk, are October 20-26. For more information go to www.busworld.org.

- **Busworld Asia** – China is the largest and fastest growing bus market in the world.

It currently is estimated to be 25 percent of the world market with annual production somewhere around 55,000 complete buses and coaches plus another 8,000 chassis more than 32-feet long. Reflecting this importance, Busworld Asia is the only Busworld show scheduled every year. The 11th edition of Busworld Asia was scheduled from March 30-April 1, 2011 at the Shanghai Automobile Exhibition Center in Shanghai, China. Overall registration was up 30 percent over the 2010 show with foreign visitor registration up 20 percent. There are about 20,000 atten-

dees representing approximately 40 different countries.

Exhibitors include all of the major Chinese bus builders as well as manufacturers from other Asian countries, joint ventures and even some international suppliers. Exhibits at the 2011 show included buses powered by both battery power and fuel cells. There was also an E-Bus Summit Conference dealing with alternate energy sources for buses. For more information go to www.busworld.org.

Turkey is increasingly gaining in importance because of an increasing number of the buses operated in Europe are built here. Busworld Turkey is similar to Busworld Kortrijk but is smaller in scale. This photo shows a Temsa Diamond coach on display at the first Busworld Turkey in 2007 in Istanbul.



The IAA Show in Hannover, Germany is huge and takes place in several buildings in a rather large area. Both buses and trucks are exhibited with the trucks being obviously in the majority. Shown here is one building dedicated to historical buses.



- **Busworld Turkey** – One of the newest Busworld shows, Busworld Turkey was founded in February of 2007. A major reason behind the creation of Busworld Turkey is the fact that more and more European buses are being built in Turkey. In addition to major local builders like Temsa, both Neoman and Mercedes-Benz have plants in Turkey. Recent figures suggest that plants in Turkey are now producing nearly half of European bus needs.

While both full-size transit buses and motorcoaches are made in Turkey, the local builders also produce smaller mid-size coaches, some with full integral characteristics. These are very appropriate for the narrow historical streets or smaller groups. The next Busworld Turkey is scheduled to take place on April 19-21, 2012 in Istanbul, Turkey.

- **Busworld India** – India is another emerging bus market and the location for another Busworld event. Recent figures released suggest that India is the second largest bus market in the world with approximately 50,000 annual registrations for buses and coaches weighing more than 12 tons gross. Buses account for more than 90 percent of public transport in India and the country is in the process of establishing a national bus building code.

The fourth Busworld India was held in Mumbai from January 10-12, 2011. There were approximately 100 exhibitors including seven of the leading Indian bus and coach body manufacturers. Keeping with a two-year schedule, the next Busworld India will take place in Mumbai in 2013. For more information go to www.busworld.org.

- **Busworld Russia** – Russia is another emerging bus market and now builds more than 50,000 buses of all types annually. Under Communism, bus production was limited by the government to certain companies in certain locations. Since the move to Capitalism, the need for buses has increased and more builders are meeting this need. The first Busworld Russia was held in June 2010. It took place in three halls of an exhibition center on the banks of the Oka River in Russia's fourth largest city, Nizhny Novgorod, about 250 miles east of Moscow. The next Busworld Russia is sched-

uled to take place in Nizhny Novogorod on July 5-7, 2012. For more information go to www.busworld.org.

- **Busworld South America** – What appears to be the latest addition to the list of Busworld shows is Busworld South America. South America is again another emerging bus market that shows signs of expansion. Busworld South America is scheduled to take place in Sao Paulo, Brazil in May of 2012. For more information go to www.busworld.org.

- **IAA Hannover** – Over the years we have attended other bus shows in Europe including the old bus display at the auto show in Frankfurt and even a bus show in Maastricht, Netherlands. However, the one other European show that gets mentioned regularly is the IAA (International Automobil Ausstellung) Commercial Vehicle Show in Hannover, Germany.

This show is limited to bus and trucks and while trucks substantially outnumber the buses, the show is very large by any standards. It takes place in a huge complex with numerous buildings with more than two million square feet of indoor display space and additional outdoor displays and activities. Beyond the regular commercial bus displays, special activities include a building dedicated to historical buses, several presentations and meetings, and an area where vehicles are tested and demonstrated outdoors by professional drivers.

As is typical in Europe, the first two days are limited to the press followed by eight days of the show open to the public. The 2006 show had 1,461 exhibitors from 46



The annual conventions of the Family Motor Coach Association can be likened to a magical city that appears overnight, lasts for a few days and then disappears again. Most of the family members arrive in their converted coaches or self-contained recreational vehicles and live in them during the show. In addition to both indoor and outdoor exhibits, FMCA shows offer a wide range of activities. FAMILY MOTOR COACH ASSOCIATION.

countries. This show is typically scheduled every two years in the years opposite Busworld Kortrijk. The next show dates are September 20-27, 2012. For information go to www.iaa.de and click on the British flag for English.

Converted Coach Shows

- **Family Motor Coach Association** – While there are numerous rallies and meetings for converted coach organizations, we

know of no national trade show geared specifically to converted coaches. However, always mentioned in this area are the two annual conventions of the Family Motor Coach Association. Founded back in 1963 when a group of housecar owners met in Hinckley, Maine to witness an eclipse, FMCA has grown into a large organization geared specifically towards owners of self-contained motor homes and converted coaches.

An FMCA convention reminds me of those stories about a mythical city that suddenly comes into being and lasts for only a few days before fading away to nothingness again. While most of the exhibitors check in to the local hotels, the family member attendees typically live in their coaches and RVs and most survive on their own water tanks, generator and batteries. From the air, the family parking areas look like a vast sea of coaches and RVs, with some past events exceeding 5,000 RVs.

Outdoor exhibits are typically new converted coaches and RVs, with Prevost being a regular exhibitor in recent years. Indoor exhibitors include all types of coach and RV supplies from parts, electronic items and toilet chemicals to insurance. Other typical exhibitors include cookware, jewelry and even clothing or hats. Several component suppliers will have crews on hand to repair and service their products. There are activities for kids, high quality evening entertainment and sometimes tours or special programs. Throw in an ice cream social, a coffee hour and entertainment during the day and what you end up with is more of an experience than an event.

Many bus shows and conventions also include seminars or other types of information of training sessions. This particular photo shows a seminar at a recent Family Motor Coach Association convention. FAMILY MOTOR COACH ASSOCIATION.



Both a spring and a summer convention are scheduled. Locations have varied through the United States with the spring event typically more likely to be in southern states. Many of the locations are at fairgrounds or a college campus and even once at an Air Force Base. The 2011 spring event was held at the fairgrounds in Perry, Georgia in March while the summer event is scheduled at the Alliant Energy Center in Madison, Wisconsin from August 10-13, 2011. You will find information at www.fmca.com.

Bus and Group Tours

There are several shows and conventions that are geared more to bus and group tours rather than actual bus vehicles and operations. Some of these have scheduled appointment sessions between tour planners and those seeking more group tour business including convention and visitor bureaus, hotels, restaurants and attractions. A few of these shows do have buses on display. Due to space limitations, we will only include a brief mention of some of the shows we are familiar with.

- **Heartland Travel Showcase** – Originally established by the Ohio Travel Association, the event has expanded to include the area from the Great Lakes to New York. The next event is scheduled to take place in Knoxville from February 24-26, 2012. See www.ohiotravel.org/heartland for more information.

- **New York Travel Expo** – The 28th annual Travel Expo New York covers New York and surrounding states and is scheduled for the Conference Center in Niagara Falls on September 7-8, 2011. Phone (315) 335-1414 for more information.

- **Travel Expo New England** – The third annual Travel Expo New England is scheduled to take place in Sturbridge, Massachusetts on June 15, 2011. Phone (315) 335-1414 for more information.

- **Travel South Showcase** – Sponsored by Travel South USA, this show primarily covers the Southern states. The next event is scheduled for March 5-7, 2012. See www.travelsouthusa.org for more information.

- **ABA Marketplace** – Sponsored by the American Bus Association, this is a national event with scheduled appointment sessions. The next event will take place in Grapevine, Texas from January 6-10, 2012. Buses are frequently on display and there is a new add-on called the Product Pavilion that includes supplier booths. See www.buses.org for more information.

- **National Tour Association** – This is also a formal, national show. Convention 11 will take place in Las Vegas, Nevada from



The Heartland Travel Showcase brings bus and group tour planners together with places that would like to have more bus tours. In common with many similar shows, Heartland offers a combination of scheduled appointment sessions with open time. This photo shows some of the exhibitor booths at the Heartland show in Cincinnati in 2007.



Attendees at the New York Travel Expo are primarily bus and group tour planners and group leaders. Exhibitors include a wide range of companies and agencies seeking more bus and group tour business. This photo was taken at the 2007 event in the Corning, New York area.

December 5-9, 2011. See www.ntaonline.com for more information.

- **OMCA Annual Conference & Marketplace** – Considered the premier event in Canada for North American packaged travel. This year's Marketplace will take place in Windsor, Ontario at Caesar's Windsor. See www.omca.com for more information.

- **Joint Tour Operator Summit** – For the first time ever ABA and OMCA offered

a joint tour operator summit. It was held on March 30-31, 2011 at the Turning Stone Resort in Verona, New York. There currently is no indication whether the event will be repeated. See www.omca.com for more information.

Composite

- **Bus Bash** – Bus Bash was founded in 1979 by Bob Redden, professional bus photographer and founder of the International Bus Collectors (IBC). It was originally pat-

turned after a one-day railroad day or aviation day show. However, with the intervention of the NATIONAL BUS TRADER staff it was expanded into a three-day event. It started on Friday evening with an informal reception, Saturday saw both a "fam" tour for tour planners as well as a "garage" tour for bus owners with a meal function in the evening. Sunday was an outdoor bus display, flea market and bus parade. Trophies were presented to first- and second-place winners in antique, modern and converted coach categories as well as an award for best demo coach on display and for the bus coming the greatest distance.

By the mid 1980s, the event had grown too large for Redden and it was purchased with all rights by Bus Bash, Inc. that then organized events and awarded licenses to host companies. Events were held in many states, typically on or near Memorial Day or Labor Day, with a total of 49 events taking place. Due to a lack of pre-registrations, the event in Birmingham, Alabama was cancelled. More events may be scheduled in the future. Watch the pages of NATIONAL BUS TRADER for any future events.

Bus Historians and Museums

Bus historians can be very professional in their own right. The good ones will explain the difference in suspension systems between a TDH4509 and a TDH4512, or the difference in engines between a PD4104 and PD4106. Their publications contain impressive information. Several of these people are employed within the bus industry, making their avocation also their vocation. Meetings



The annual Spring Fling is usually held in June at the Museum of Bus Transportation in Hershey, Pennsylvania. In addition to the restored buses on display in the main building, the annex is opened so attendees can view other buses in the museum collection. Here, Spike Michaud pauses to speak with a vendor at the extensive flea market at the Spring Fling in 2008. ROBERT BEARD.

and conventions typically do not include commercial displays but are good places for meeting other bus people or learning about buses.

- **Motor Bus Society** – The MBS is based in the Northeast states but has members all over. The group has a regular publication named *Motor Coach Age*. They typically have two conventions each

year. They will meet in Cleveland on October 14-16, 2011, in Los Angeles on April 27-29, 2012, and in Buffalo on October 5-7, 2012. For information go to www.motorbussociety.org.

- **Bus History Association** – BHA has a regular publication named *Bus Industry* that provides a great deal of bus information. Membership comes from all over but they do have a strong Canadian component. Their 2011 convention will take place in Regina and Winnipeg from June 10-13, 2011. See www.bus-history.org for more information.

- **Museum of Bus Transportation** – Located in Hershey, Pennsylvania, the Museum of Bus Transportation shares a beautiful facility and shows several antique and restored buses. Their annual Spring Fling gathering showcases the museum as well as other buses stored or under restoration and includes a substantial flea market for bus collectables. See www.buseum.org.

- **A Gathering of Buses** – Founded by Charles Wotring these gatherings include bus displays, a bus flea market and other activities. The next event is planned in conjunction with the Greyhound Bus Museum in Hibbing, Minnesota and is scheduled for August 16-18, 2011. For information e-mail charleswotring@comcast.net.

- **Scenicruise 2011** – This gathering of PD4501 Scenicruiser owners first took place in Amarillo and Adrian, Texas in early April of 2010. Tom McNally, who owns a beautifully restored Scenicruiser,

Bus Bash events have traditionally included a wide range of activities including a welcome reception, both a garage and "fam" tour, meals and bus displays. Attendees include commercial and private bus owners, tour planners and others interested in the bus industry. Shown here are the trophy winners at the 2007 Bus Bash at Thunder Bay resort in Hillman, Michigan.



was master of ceremonies. Attending were 10 Scenicruisers, three other historical coaches and numerous professional bus people and historians. Another similar event is planned to take place on May 13-14, 2011 at Grand Canyon Caverns in Arizona. For information contact Chad Goertz at (661) 212-2026 or chadgoertz2@msn.com.

Disclaimer

Once again we point out that this list is not complete. Additional information is welcome and should be sent to info@busmag.com. Please check with the organizations and groups to confirm dates and locations as well as registration and membership requirements. □

The first Scenicruise event took place in Texas in 2010 and was primarily a gathering of Scenicruisers and those people interested in them. This photo shows some of the 10 Scenicruisers and three other coaches that showed up in Amarillo, Texas for the 2010 event. Another Scenicruise event is scheduled for May of 2011.



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