

MCI Celebrates 80 Years of Bus Production

This year marks a special anniversary for Motor Coach Industries. It was exactly 80 years ago, in 1933, that the company designed and built its first bus. The story over these 80 years has been fascinating. Among other things it involves building coaches to withstand the harsh Canadian winters and early roads, Harry Zoltok designing buses by sketching with chalk on the production room floor, years of affiliation with Greyhound, providing Greyhound with the coach that replaced the Scenicruiser, building durable coaches that became the most popular on the market, manufacturing coaches in three different countries and recently adding the Setra to its product line.

All of this makes for an interesting story because there were numerous incidents along the way that shaped the future of MCI. Let me take a few minutes to relate MCI's history from the standpoint of some of these interesting incidents and decisions that made MCI what it is today.

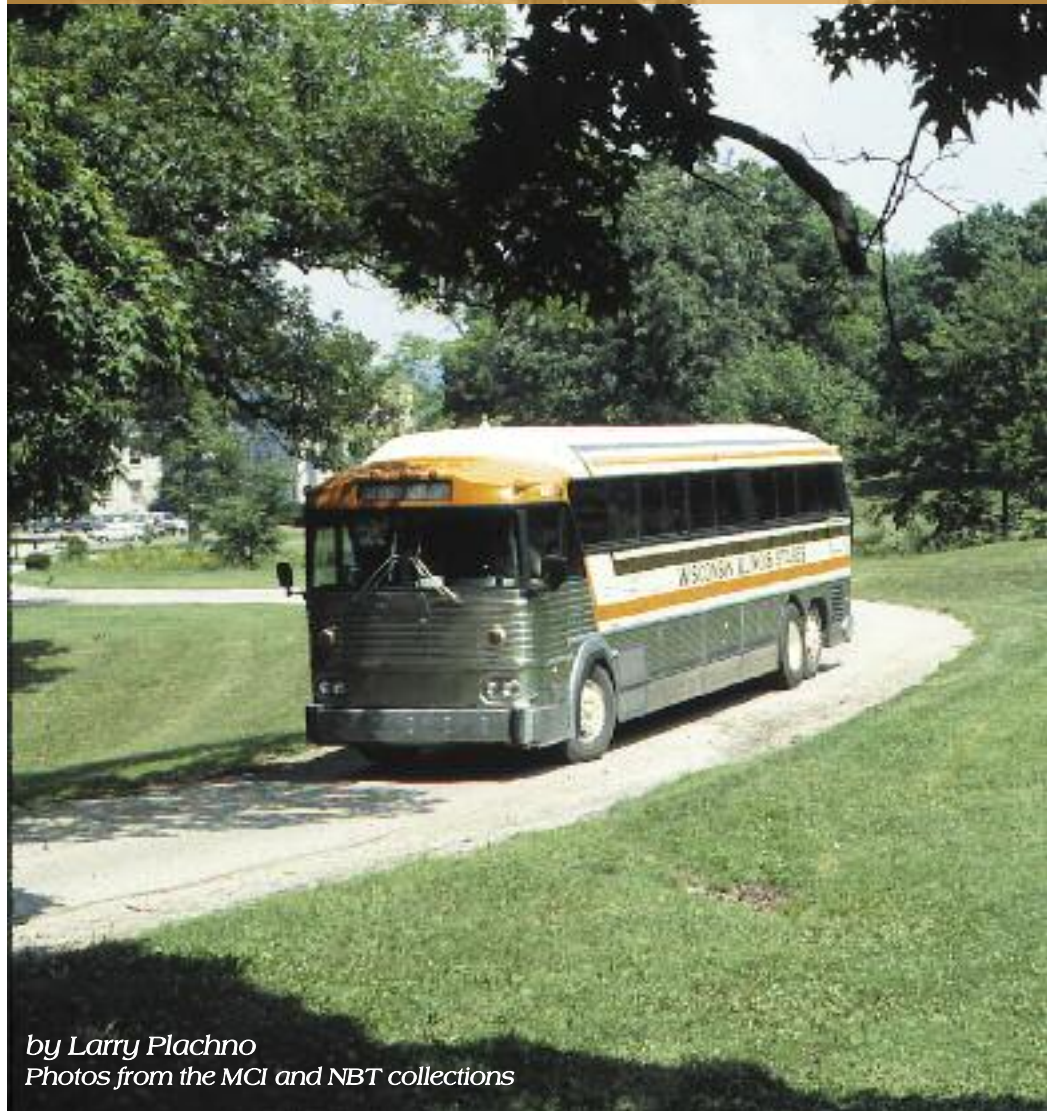
It All Started in Winnipeg

Winnipeg, Manitoba has always been one of my favorite cities. It started out as somewhat of a wild and woolly frontier town and while it may have matured and become more civilized over the years, it continues to attract people who are not afraid of hard work and who have a well-developed sense of community. It is easily the most industrialized Canadian city for a distance of at least 800 miles.

What became Winnipeg started out as a trading post of the Hudson Bay Company located less than 70 miles north of the United States near where the Assiniboine River emptied into the Red River. Fort Garry, named for Nicholas Garry who was an important director of the Hudson Bay Company, was built somewhere around 1821.

The new fort was washed away in the flood of 1826, an ongoing problem in those years. The fort was rebuilt upstream (north) about five years later at Selkirk in what was considered a safer location. However, since trade and commerce continued at "the forks" where the rivers met, a second and fairly substantial fort was built there in 1835. It was named Upper Fort Garry to differentiate it from Lower Fort Garry at Selkirk. One contemporary report relates that a commercial enterprise located immediately outside the walls of the fort was a liquor store. One presumes that this enterprise helped local residents ward off frostbite in the cold winter months.

Some people today humorously refer to the community as "Winterpeg" because it sometimes has snow on the ground for half of the year. Worse yet, the area is occasionally prone to flooding when the ice in the Red River breaks up in the spring. In spite of all of this, or possibly because of it, the area attracted many enterprising people.



by Larry Plachno
Photos from the MCI and NBT collections

MCI's "Reliability Driven" tag line is likely endorsed by most coach operators considering MCI's market share. Originally designed by Harry Zoltok to deal with early Canadian roads and harsh winters, MCI coaches today have an enviable reputation for both durability and reliability. Shown here is an MC-7 operated by Wisconsin Illinois Stages of Delavan, Wisconsin, a company owned by your editor.

Winnipeg became a major railroad and transportation center as well as providing the birthplace for numerous businesses and industries including two major bus builders.

Zoltok was born in Russia in 1905 but left his native land when the Communists rose to power. He arrived in Winnipeg in 1928 and one report suggests that he was so impressed by the cleanliness and width of Portage Avenue, that paralleled the Assiniboine River for quite a distance, that he decided to settle here. He liked to work with vehicles and with his hands so he became involved in a partnership known as J.R. Horne and Co. that worked on and repaired automobiles including some custom work.

In spite of the Depression, in 1932 Zoltok partnered with Fred Sicinski and opened a business in a 5,000-square foot building on Fort Street in downtown Winnipeg within walking distance of "the forks" where the two rivers met. Since this was near the location of the old Fort Garry, they named their new company the Fort Garry Motor Body and Paint Works, Ltd.

A year later, in 1933, the little company entered into real vehicle production by building an 11-passenger body on a Packard car chassis. Initially, the company followed typical limousine procedure by cutting the vehicles in half and extending them. However, Fort Garry Motor Body

Wow Factor



The Number One Selling Coach in America

There are many factors that influence why the MCI® J4500 is the #1 selling coach in the US & Canada.

For eight years running, the MCI® J4500 has held this enviable position, earned by operators who have chosen it for durability and classic good looks, now made even better.

The all-new J4500 drives past industry standards of excellence, engineering, and aesthetics with over 30 major improvements. These include military-spec multiplex modules with 30% reduction in wiring, reduced connections using Deutsch waterproof connectors, brushless evaporator and condenser motors designed to last 10 years with no maintenance, LED headlights with a 5-year warranty, and powertrain optimization resulting in a 13% improvement in fuel economy.

Whether you are driving through town or across the country, the J4500's restyled body lines create a dramatic, modern appearance with a heightened curb appeal. We factor in high-style, operating economy, and reliability as key components of our Reliability Driven Philosophy, knowing they all impact your bottom line. Now it's time to make this new 2013 MCI® J4500 #1 in your fleet.



and Paint Works then began building their own larger bodies and putting them on truck chassis.

Decisions

The year 1937 proved to be a major milestone for the little company and involved several decisions. In that year they turned out a coach for Grey Goose Bus Lines that was built entirely by Fort Garry Motor Body and Paint Works and did not involve using an outside chassis. This moved the company a step closer towards integral construction and increased durability.

It also marked a decision that Fort Garry Motor Body and Paint Works would concentrate on over-the-road coaches in the future. In the following year, 1938, the company discontinued the automobile repair business and began concentrating on coaches. In contrast, the other bus builder in Winnipeg, Western Auto and Truck Body Works, builder of Western Flyer buses, would eventually make the opposite decision and concentrate on transit buses.

I might also note that as time went on, Zoltok began moving into construction with stainless steel to reduce corrosion and increase the longevity of coaches. This again was a marked contrast because General Motors used aluminum to reduce corrosion. It is noteworthy that in our market today, other coach manufacturers have followed the lead of MCI with stainless steel construction.

The Greyhound Connection

As so often happens in history, one decision contributes to something else. In this situation the improved quality at the Fort Garry Auto Body and Paint Works became



The Fort Garry Motor Body and Paint Works built their first bus in 1933. It consisted of a stretched 11-passenger body on a Packard car chassis. In following years the company built larger bodies and put them on truck chassis.

known to Canadian Greyhound Lines and that in turn fostered a long-term relationship with Greyhound.

Not unexpectedly, Canadian Greyhound Lines was having difficulty finding buses capable of dealing with rugged Canadian winters and roads. They were currently operating several 1930 model "Y" Yellow Coach buses that had high mileage engines and were starting to have body problems.

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.

Pleased with the work on rebuilding their model "Y" Yellow Coaches, Canadian Greyhound turned to the Fort Garry Motor Body and Paint Works again. This time the problem was a group of four Yellow Coach model 732 coaches purchased by Canadian Greyhound in late 1936. They had proven to be a disappointment. In addition to being heavy they were unable to deal with the harsh Canadian weather and road conditions, and their engines started giving up. They were returned to Yellow Coach in 1937.

The management from Canadian Greyhound turned to Fort Garry Auto Body and Paint Works. They asked Zoltok to design a coach larger than anything they then had running that could transport 37 passengers. Above all, it had to deal with Canadian road and weather conditions. In addition, the Canadian Greyhound people wanted it to have many of the features of the Yellow Coach model 743 Super Coach but none of its shortcomings. As you might expect, this was a very tall order, particularly since Yellow Coach/General Motors was considered the leading bus builder at that time. However, it was also obvious that success would propel the Fort Garry Motor Body and Paint Works into the big time. Any bus that could operate safely, reliably and economically in the local environment would be a winner

Over much of its life, MCI has had strong connections with Greyhound Lines. Taken in the 1940s, this photo shows some MCI Model 200 coaches operated by Greyhound of Canada. Years later, MCI would be acquired by Greyhound.



any place else. Zoltok agreed to build such a vehicle.

Numerous people have said that Zoltok was a natural engineer. In these days prior to computers and sophisticated drafting equipment, Zoltok developed the habit of sketching a needed part or assembly on the floor of the factory in chalk. In some cases the area was roped off until the part was completed.

The people from Greyhound provided Zoltok with information on both the advantages and shortcomings of the Yellow Coach 743 Super Coach. He went to work on the floor with his chalk. What resulted was the new model 37-UM that was turned out in September of 1938. These buses were a substantial step forward but they lacked full integral construction and were powered by an underfloor Hall-Scott pancake engine.

Trans Continental immediately placed an order for two at \$15,000 each. In November of 1938, Central Greyhound ordered four more at \$15,600 each.

The new coaches were not yet out of the door when Harry took his chalk and started designing a new and improved bus that would be called the model 150. It was somewhat patterned after the new Yellow Coach PDG series that introduced the "Silversides" models in the United States. It retained a front radiator and underfloor pancake engine.

However, on the positive side, this new model moved closer to integral construction and introduced exterior paneling. In later years this became traditional stainless steel siding on MCI coaches. However, a major improvement on the model 150 was the use of ducts for distributing heat throughout the coach, replacing individual floor heaters on earlier models. These vents could also be used for cooler air in the summer months. Canadian Greyhound was so impressed that they immediately placed an order for 10 of these coaches.

With Canadian Greyhound as a major customer and sales increasing, Fred Sicinski and Zoltok decided in 1940 to expand and reorganize the company. It was recapitalized and renamed Motor Coach Industries. At this same time, operations were moved to a larger 20,000-square foot facility at Erin and St. Matthews Street, almost directly west of the original location. This move provided four times as much space as the original Fort Garry location and allowed for a real production line operation. This location came to be called Plant 1 and served as the company's primary production facility for about 25 years.

Shortly after moving into the new factory, bus production was curtailed because of the war effort. The factory was open 24 hours per day and concentrated on producing military vehicles. MCI did build a trolley bus for Winnipeg in 1942. It was the first trolley bus built in Canada and it remained in service for 25 years. Additional units were not built because of the wartime scarcity of materials and the high import duties on traction motors.

Regular bus production resumed after the war, but MCI remained a small and almost obscure bus builder. In 1947, MCI was building a new coach every two weeks and hence turning out about 25 or 26 coaches per year. However, this was a time of substantial improvement at MCI. Zoltok continued to design parts and assemblies that increased the quality of MCI coaches.

This was also a period that saw the relationship between MCI and Canadian Greyhound grow stronger. In 1940, Canadian Greyhound operated a total of 67 vehicles. These were primarily older Yellow Coaches, Kenworths and Hayes-Anderson buses with only

Several of the earlier MCI coaches were used in sightseeing service and had special features. This coach was operated by Brewster and presumably saw service in and near Banff. Note the windows in the roof to enhance sightseeing.



Moving into Plant 1 on St. Matthews Street was a major step forward for the little company since it permitted a real assembly line operation for the first time. It served as the primary MCI production facility for about 25 years until the arrival of 40-foot coaches created a need for more space. This facility is still in operation today building parts and components.





In 1940, production moved to Plant 1 on St. Matthews St. Almost immediately, bus production ceased as the company was drawn into the war effort. Coach production would be centered here until the late 1960s when the new Fort Garry facility opened.



In spite of the war effort, MCI did build a bus in 1942. It was a city transit bus powered by overhead trolley wires and was reportedly the first trolley bus built in Canada. It operated in Winnipeg for 25 years.



MCI's Model 96 was the last major model prior to the start of the MC-1 series. It was introduced in 1956 and was built into 1960, even after the MC-1 was introduced. This example was operated by Mac Kenzie Bus Line Ltd.

17 newer MCI coaches. By 1950, Canadian Greyhound was operating 129 coaches which were all from MCI. Clearly, the MCI coaches were meeting their requirements for dealing with Canadian roads and Canadian winters.

Seeing an opportunity in the immediate post-war years, MCI briefly ventured into other types of manufacturing with two subsidiaries. In 1946, a new plant was built on the corner of St. Matthews and Wall Street, essentially across the railroad tracks from the existing St. Matthews facility. This was partially constructed from World War II packing cases and logically became known as Plant 2. Initially it was used for the operations of the National Products Pole Line hardware division as well as the manufacture of road machinery.

Greyhound Ownership

The affiliation with Canadian Greyhound took a new turn in 1948 when the directors of Greyhound of Canada entered into an agreement to purchase 65 percent of MCI. Sicinski retired at this time and Zoltok became president of MCI. This increasing involvement with Canadian Greyhound helped MCI grow since one source indicates that the company built more than 300 coaches from 1945 to 1949. This means that production had increased to more than one coach each week.

Once again the floor of the plant became a blackboard for Zoltok's chalk engineering sketches of different components or assemblies that would improve production. Like General Motors, Zoltok believed that platform integral construction was the most durable and had the most longevity. While Zoltok's version of platform integral was different than that used by General Motors, it continues to survive today in MCI's "D" model coaches.

Another difference is that General Motors liked to use a lot of aluminum to reduce corrosion and increase longevity. In comparison, Zoltok and MCI went with stainless steel for the same reasons. More than one person has suggested that the harsh Canadian winters and resulting salt on the roads became a major reason why MCI embraced stainless steel construction at an early date.

MCI's future was substantially determined by developments in the United States in the 1950s. General Motors introduced their new PD4104 model in 1953 and Greyhound's new Scenicruiser in 1954. In 1955, GM built 84 percent of all buses in the United States (both coaches and transits) while plucky Flexible built another seven percent. All other builders combined shared the remaining nine percent.

As a personal note, I would suggest the fact that a major reason for GM's prominence in sales was that their buses and coaches were good, reliable and durable. However,

in 1956, the U.S. Department of Justice filed an antitrust suit against General Motors. Greyhound in the U.S. was named since they were the largest customer of GM, spending about \$20 million annually for GM buses. While the suit never went to trial, GM would back out of the bus building business and Greyhound would build its own buses to sever its connection with GM.

MCI became Greyhound's prime candidate for a captive bus builder. Greyhound of Canada already owned a major share in the company. Greyhound also had a subsidiary in Pembina, North Dakota, 68 miles south of Winnipeg, known as the Greyhound Motor and Supply Company. It manufactured engine parts and assembled motors.

Greyhound's official history suggests that Zoltok needed some convincing but eventually agreed with the plan. In 1958, Greyhound acquired full 100 percent ownership of MCI. Zoltok remained as company president and was also elected to the Greyhound Board of Directors.

MCI immediately set out to develop an improved and modern heavy-duty coach suitable for the needs of Greyhound in the United States. This developmental era covered four models – MC-1 through MC-4 – and approximately six years. During this period, Greyhound in the United States continued to buy coaches from GM while Canadian Greyhound continued to buy buses from MCI.

The prototype MC-1 was developed in 1958 and went into production in 1959. Major changes from previous models included modern slanting passenger windows, fluted stainless steel siding, the destination sign was moved to the roof cap above the windshield, and both air conditioning and air ride suspension were included. The prototype MC-2 was built in 1959 with regular production in 1960 and 1961. Major changes in the MC-2 included the more powerful 6V-71 engine replacing the 4-71 in the MC-1.

A prototype MC-3 was built in 1961 with regular production following from 1961 to 1963. Most of the changes were cosmetic and minor. In 1961, a prototype MC-4 was built and regular production took place in 1963. The most major change on the MC-4 was in the drive train with the more powerful 8V-71 engine and a Spicer four-speed transmission.

Moving into the U.S. Market

It appears that the MC-4 model passed the approval of Greyhound in the United States because MCI became a wholly-owned subsidiary of Greyhound in 1962 and plans started on a new production scheme. Fourteen acres were acquired in Pembina to build a 31,000-square foot plant for finishing coaches for the U.S. market. A new facility in Winnipeg, built at a cost of \$525,000, became



After Greyhound acquired full ownership of MCI in 1958, MCI produced a series of four coaches named MC-1 through MC-4. They effectively took MCI's existing expertise in coach construction and moved it into a more modern design suited for Greyhound Lines in the United States. Numerous improvements were made from model to model including increased power and the traditional MCI styling with stainless steel siding. Shown here is an MC-2.

known as Plant 3 and was located across from Plant 1 on the west side of Erin Street.

Under the new plan, Plant 1 would cease building completed coaches and would instead build unfinished coach bodies. Those intended for delivery to U.S. customers would be trucked on company-owned flatbed trailers 68 miles south to Pembina for finishing. This simplified customs on U.S. components and also met what came to be called the "Buy America" provisions for

agencies buying with federal money. Coaches intended for delivery to Canadian customers would be finished at the new Plant 3. Portions of this production scheme still survive today.

This new production arrangement got started on September 13, 1963 when the first shell arrived at the new Pembina facility. In a relatively short time, 300 coaches of the new MC-5 model were built and delivered to Greyhound from Pembina. This created

Motor Coach Industries was still relatively unknown in the United States until the new Pembina facility opened in late 1963. With the delivery of the first MC-5 and MC-5A coaches to Greyhound, the industry took notice and began placing orders for MCI coaches. This Greyhound MC-5A was photographed in April of 1979 coming up the ramp from the old Chicago Greyhound Terminal on Randolph Street. The simplified paint scheme indicated that it was one of several coaches being offered for sale.





Since its opening, the Pembina facility has been limited to completing coach bodies from Plant 1 or the Fort Garry plant in Canada. This photo looks towards the start of the Pembina line in the MC-9 era.



With the opening of the new Fort Garry facility, new coaches were partially completed up there. Then, the shells were transported on flatbed trucks across the border to Pembina where they were completed.

a new record by bringing coach production up to one coach per day.

Bear in mind that up until this point, MCI coaches were rare in the United States. Once Greyhound in the United States began taking delivery of MCI coaches in large numbers, other operators began lining up to sign orders. By 1964, MCI coaches were being offered to other bus operators in the United States. Campus Travel, Inc. of New York City became the first non-Greyhound buyer and operator in the United States.

It seems like the new production program had barely started when MCI began talking of improvements in 1965. Sales of MCI coaches to operators other than Greyhound in the United States were growing. At the same time, Greyhound was talking about a new MC-6 model that would be 40-feet long.

I have been in Plant 1 on St. Matthews. There is a walkway above a relatively small production line area. Things were tight with the 35-foot MC-5 and MC-5A models. They

would be impossible with 40-foot coaches, particularly if production increased.

The revised plan involved the purchase of a 24-acre site in the municipality of Fort Garry on the south side of Winnipeg. I might note that the name might sound confusing since the actual Fort Garry was located in downtown Winnipeg just north of where the two rivers meet. Construction started on a new 134,000-square foot plant set up for the production of 40-foot coaches. For obvious reasons, this became known as the Fort Garry plant. Plant 2 on St. Matthews would receive a 66,000-square foot expansion and the Pembina facility would get a 66,000-square foot expansion. All of this required an investment of \$6.5 million in 1966 money. While all this expansion was going on, production of the MC-5A coaches reached two coaches a day.

The new production plan would see coaches produced at the new Fort Garry plant and then trucked to Pembina for finishing. At this time even the coaches going to Canada were completed in Pembina. The

old St. Matthews Plant 1 would no longer produce buses and would become active as a support facility producing parts. This new plan went into effect in 1968. Although this arrangement was made for the MC-6 model, it was the MC-7 model that started production at the new Fort Garry facility. It was MCI's MC-7 model that replaced Greyhound's Scenicruisers and became the new flagship of the Greyhound fleet.

The Fuel Crisis and Roswell

Zoltok retired in 1971 after having been with the company for nearly four decades. He obviously left his mark on the company and some of his procedures are still in use today.

MCI coaches had been increasing in popularity. The fuel crisis of 1973 prompted increasing orders for MCI coaches to a point where there was no production left over for Greyhound. MCI's solution was to establish a sister company in a converted aircraft hangar in Roswell, New Mexico known as Transportation Manufacturing Corporation.

The Pembina plant is shown in this aerial photo shortly after it opened in late 1963. It is located within a stone's throw of the United States-Canadian border and has always completed coaches started elsewhere.



The new Fort Garry plant is located south of Winnipeg and went into production in June of 1968. It was designed to produce 40-foot coaches since that increased length would have been difficult at Plant 1.



This went into production in 1974 with the new model MC-8. Coaches were essentially the same as those produced in Winnipeg other than they had "TMC" on the noseplate instead of "MCI."

It is noteworthy that for the first eight years of production, Roswell did not have its own parts manufacturing line. Parts and KD (knocked down) shells were shipped to Roswell from the Fort Garry plant. They also shipped shells to Pembina on flatbed trucks. All of the initial production at Roswell was for Greyhound but in later years many of the coaches went to other operators. It was not until 1982 that Roswell established its own parts manufacturing line.

The second fuel crisis in 1979 saw production expand to new levels. The Fort Garry and Pembina plants were turning out five coaches per working day and were also supplying two coaches per day KD for Roswell. Due to increased interest in the 40-foot coaches, MCI discontinued its 35-foot coach in June of 1980.

In an interesting turn of events, MCI purchased the transit operations of General Motors in 1987. The RTS line was moved to Roswell and MCI took over the facility in Ste. Eustache, Quebec. Transit bus production was sold to Nova Bus in 1994. Coach production ended at Roswell in 1990. Your editor has a 102C3 that was one of the last coaches built at Roswell.

From Greyhound and to Mexico

Greyhound Corp. began moving out of the transportation business in late 1986 when it announced that it would sell Greyhound Lines to a group of investors. In 1993, MCI and the other companies involved in the Transportation Manufacturing Operations segment of Dial Corp. (formerly Greyhound Corp.) were spun off as an autonomous corporation known as Motor Coach Industries International. This ended the direct Greyhound ownership of MCI that had started back in 1948.

This independence did not last long. In 1994, MCII merged with Dina of Mexico following a complex arrangement involving a subsidiary in the United States and an exchange of MCI and Dina stock. Almost immediately, MCI began selling the Mexican-built Dina Viaggio bus in the United States. Then, MCI engineers developed a new integral coach model which went into production at the Dina factory in Sahagun, Mexico. A 40-foot version was sold to Mexican operators and the 35-foot version became known as the model F3500 and was sold in the United States by MCI.

Following that, MCI developed the new G model in conjunction with Greyhound. It was initially produced at the Sahagun plant in Mexico. Hence, for a period of a few years, MCI was building buses in three countries.



Coach orders increased with the fuel crisis of 1973 so production capacity was expanded with the new Transportation Manufacturing Corporation facility adjacent to the airport in Roswell, New Mexico. Initial production was for Greyhound but eventually coaches for other operators were built here. The facility also built RTS transit buses for several years.

When the Flxible Company ceased bus production, MCI stepped in to take over their parts business and their primary facility in Loudonville, Ohio. Although MCI has not built new buses here, Loudonville has been active in making parts and has developed an enviable reputation for refurbishing and repowering work.

Going Home to Winnipeg

The connection between Dina and MCI became strained because of economic problems in Mexico and financial problems with Dina. In June of 2000, an investment group led by Joseph Littlejohn and Levy, Inc., a New York investment firm, acquired

approximately 61 percent controlling interest in MCII Holdings (USA), Inc. Among other things, MCI ended up with the former Dina facility in Mexico. For a while, MCI continued bus production at the Fort Garry plant in Winnipeg, in Pembina and in Sahagun. However, a slow down in the economy and a new labor agreement at the Fort Garry facility prompted MCI to concentrate production and engineering in Winnipeg.

To accomplish this, MCI invested \$40 million in Canadian dollars that included two new facilities at the Fort Garry complex. One was a 62,254-square foot Coach Finishing facility that handled the testing of air conditioning systems plus detailing and final

MCI acquired the former Flxible facility in Loudonville, Ohio in 1996 after Flxible ceased production. Today, both new coach parts and aftermarket bus parts are built here. Loudonville also has an excellent reputation for collision repair, major refurbishing and drive train updates.





With the 2003 closing of the plant in Sahagun, Mexico, MCI concentrated most of its production at an improved Fort Garry facility. One major improvement was a coach finishing facility with state-of-the-art painting facilities and a final inspection point. Shown here is the second improvement, an 8,040-square foot Delivery Center where customers can come to pick up their new coaches.

inspection of coaches. It also included modern multi-stage paint booths that permit sequential application of base and multi-color paint in a line. The second new facility was an 8,040-square foot coach Delivery Center similar to the one already in operation at Pembina.

Facilities in Mexico were officially closed on February 17, 2003. All production was transferred to the Fort Garry facility. Under the new plan the D model coaches were framed up at the Fort Garry facility in Winnipeg and then trucked to the Pembina facility for completion. Other models were totally built in Winnipeg. This production plan continues today.

The Modern Era

MCI took a major step forward and a break with tradition by designing a modern web frame coach for the upscale charter and tour market known as the Renaissance®. It quickly became known as the E model and went into production in 1997. Based on requests from customers, MCI developed the J model that retained much of the modern styling of the Renaissance but offered more of a “bread and butter” coach. It went into production in 2001 with Peter Pan Bus Lines taking delivery of the first coaches off of the line. By 2004 the J4500 became the most popular intercity coach model in the

United States and Canada and has retained that title for nine years.

Due in large part to problems caused by the spin off in 1993 and the following Dina years, MCI went through a reorganization in late 2008 and early 2009. Franklin Mutual Advisors, LLC became the company’s majority shareholder.

More recently, MCI noted that their customers were increasingly interested in pre-owned and refurbished coaches because of the flat economy. As a result, they developed a pre-owned coach program that provided three different levels of quality and even offered a limited warranty on some coaches. In addition, MCI emphasized its offerings in refurbishing and repowering pre-owned coaches. MCI’s Loudonville facility is doing some major work in this area for customers.

In addition to MCI selling more coaches on the U.S. and Canadian market for decades, it can also boast the most popular model. Originally introduced in 2001, the J4500 became the most popular model on the market in 2004, a position it has retained for nine years. This improved and enhanced version of the J4500 was introduced for 2013.



Recent developments include transition to wide ride suspension in 2009 on the J4500 model followed by a substantial round of improvements on this same model with a major face lift in 2013. In mid-year 2012, MCI took over responsibility for the sale, support, service and parts for Setra coaches in the United States and Canada. This includes both the TopClass S 417 model and the ComfortClass S 407 model.

Today’s MCI is vastly different from the little company that Zoltok founded. For decades it has been the market leader in intercity coach sales in the United States and Canada. At least part of the reason for the popularity of MCI coaches dates back to the early days with Zoltok. He took on the challenge to build a coach that could operate reliably and economically in the worst that Canadian roads and weather could offer. That achievement has not been lost on bus operators over the years. Hence, there is some obvious merit to MCI’s tag line of “Reliability Driven.” □

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