

Greyhound Buses Through the Years

Part II

As goes Greyhound, so goes the bus industry

by Larry Plachno



As soon as World War II ended, Greyhound began working on a new bus design. This GX-1 prototype was built in 1947. It offered several innovations including the multiple level design, air suspension and dual engines which would impact the industry by being used in later models. However, the GX-1 proved to be too radical a design for that time and was never put into production. NBT.

This is the second and final section of this article. The first section, covering from 1914 through World War II, was published in the September 2002 issue of NATIONAL BUS TRADER.

General Motors

Bus production was severely curtailed during the war years. What few buses were produced did not have silversiding because of wartime restrictions. For a period, the bus assembly line at Pontiac was used to produce "ducks" for the war effort. General Motors acquired the remaining interests in Yellow Coach and on October 1, 1943, Yellow Coach officially became GM Truck &

Coach Division, which amounted to little more than a name change.

In 1945, soon after the war ended, Greyhound was already working on plans for a radically new bus. In 1947, a prototype known as the GX-1 was built by Greyhound Motors & Supply which now occupied the old Will/Tropicair facility. It was a double deck design with two engines, side aisles, air suspension and the driver on the upper level. It was never put into production and any use in revenue service was minimal.

Like many bus operators, Greyhound was desperate for buses following the war. Years of heavy operation with few new buses had been hard on the fleet. Instead of

waiting to develop a substantially new model, Greyhound had General Motors dust off the old Silversides design and improve it somewhat. The result was 1,643 model PD3751 coaches built in 1947-48 and 357 model PD4151 coaches built in 1948. This 2,000-bus order holds a record for the largest intercity bus order for decades. While it was being produced in late 1947, GM was turning out 33 integral buses each working day which is another record.

Greyhound's continued search for a new post-war model resulted in the GX-2 prototype or first Scenicruiser in 1949. The GX-2 pioneered the 40-foot coach length and obtained legislation from states which would permit the operation of 40 foot long



Greyhound's PD4501 Scenicruiser represented a major step forward in bus development. *Left:* The GX-2 prototype of 1949 was responsible for obtaining approval for 40-foot coaches on American highways. It also pioneered several new systems and developments. *Right:* The PD4501 Scenicruiser, an exclusive model for Greyhound, entered regular production in 1954. It not only was the first production run of 40-foot coaches but also represented the first model where air conditioning and a restroom were standard equipment. This one was photographed in Oklahoma City in 1972. FRED RAYMAN.

buses. It also served as a test bed for several new innovations and systems. What resulted were three different General Motors coach models that went into production in the early 1950s and took bus development a major step forward.

The 35-foot PD4104 entered production in 1953 and a total of 5,065 units were built before production ended in 1960. While Greyhound was the largest user of the PD4104, it was purchased by many bus operators. A total of 1,001 PD4501 Scenicruiser coaches were built from 1954 to 1956. The Scenicruiser had a deck-and-a-half, a length of 40 feet, and was an exclusive model for Greyhound. The third model in this group was the PD4901 Golden Chariot which effectively was a PD4104 raised

slightly and lengthened to 40 feet. Only one was built in 1954 and it never entered regular production.

Fostered by Greyhound, the PD4104/Scenicruiser series became a major step forward in intercity bus development. They pioneered air ride suspension and perfected power steering in highway coaches. The Scenicruisers represented the first highway coach model where a rest room and air conditioning was standard equipment. It is also noteworthy that the Scenicruiser represented the first production run of 40-foot highway coaches. The Scenicruiser prompted Trailways to introduce their own 40-foot Eagle coach in 1958 and eventually encouraged the entire intercity coach industry to move up to 40 foot coaches.

In 1953 and 1954, Greyhound took delivery of some of the first PD4104 coaches. These were delivered without rest rooms. From 1954 to 1956, the Scenicruisers arrived and quickly took over as the flagship model of the Greyhound fleet. After the arrival of the Scenicruisers, Greyhound took delivery of more PD4104s from 1957 to 1960. These last PD4104s had rest rooms and the improved air conditioning systems.

During the late 1950s, GM was building only one intercity bus model, the PD4104, but had virtually all of the highway coach business because most of the other manufacturers other than Flxible had given up highway coach production. In 1956, GM was hit with an antitrust suit from the U.S. Department of Justice because they controlled 84 percent of new transit and highway coach sales in the United States. At this same time the traditional relationship between Greyhound and GM had soured because of problems with the dual engines and two level transmissions in the Scenicruisers.

The Scenicruiser problems were resolved in 1961 and 1962 when Marmon Herrington in Indianapolis designed a rebuilding package for Greyhound and trained Greyhound shop people on installation. As a result, the Scenicruisers were rebuilt at several of Greyhound's major garages with a single 8V-71 engine and a simple four-speed mechanical transmission. However, Greyhound had elected to look elsewhere for its buses. In 1958, Greyhound purchased Motor Coach Industries of Winnipeg, Manitoba and began a transition to purchasing MCI coaches exclusively which would take nearly a decade.

Motor Coach Industries

The company was originally founded in Winnipeg, Manitoba as the Fort Garry Motor Body Co., but changed its name to Motor

The PD4104 introduced air ride suspension and offered both power steering and a restroom. Greyhound became the largest buyer and operator of the PD4104 although it was also available to other bus companies. Greyhound's pre-Scenicruiser PD4104 coaches built in 1953 and 1954 were delivered without restrooms. Those delivered after the Scenicruisers from 1957 to 1960 came with restrooms and an improved air conditioning system. NBT.



Coach Industries in 1942. In the early years the company was a small regional bus builder with a relatively small number of coaches produced annually. Western Canadian Greyhound began buying buses from the company in 1938 and soon became its biggest customer. In 1948, Greyhound Lines of Canada acquired 65 percent ownership of MCI and increased production.

Although Greyhound Corp. acquired ownership of MCI in 1958, it took nine years to make the complete transition from buying GM coaches to buying only MCI coaches. MCI immediately began developing a suitable coach for Greyhound's use. The prototype 35-foot MC-1 was developed in 1958 and was followed in subsequent years by the MC-2, MC-3 and MC-4, all of which were built and sold only in Canada. Greyhound was apparently pleased with the developing coach models because a new MCI facility was established in Pembina, North Dakota in 1964. Located 80 miles south of Winnipeg and within walking distance of the international boundary, the Pembina facility served the dual purpose of increasing MCI production capacity while completing production in the United States to provide significant U.S. content. This not only saved on import taxes but also allowed the resulting coaches to comply with "Buy America" requirements.

The Pembina facility opened with the MC-5 model. Western Greyhound Lines took delivery of 90 units in 1964, thus starting the long-standing Greyhound-MCI relationship. Greyhound then took delivery of MC-5A coaches in 1965, 1966 and 1967 as MCI production increased.

Greyhound continued to purchase GM coaches for fleet replacement while MCI was increasing production to meet Greyhound's

requirements. More PD4104 coaches with rest rooms were added to the fleet through 1960. From 1961 to 1965, Greyhound began taking delivery of GM's newer model PD4106. The last GM model received by Greyhound was the PD4107 in 1966 and 1967. After this, new coaches came entirely from MCI.

While the PD4106 and MC-5A offered a few industry improvements, including the respected 8V-71 engine, they were more evolutionary than revolutionary. Both models effectively closed out the 35-foot coach era at Greyhound and had a reputation for being economical and trustworthy.

By mid-decade, Greyhound was looking for a new model to replace their Scenicruisers and began working with MCI on a model to be designated the MC-6. It turned out to be a 40-foot coach with a width of 102 inches, three levels, a sloping aisle, a 12-cylinder engine, and a host of unusual features. Going from the then conventional 96 inch width to a 102 width provided more room for passengers while also improving the ride because the suspension components were further outboard.

While the Scenicruiser of the 1950s pioneered the new coach length of 40 feet, the MC-6 was intended to pioneer the new coach width of 102 inches in the 1960s. Unfortunately, the appropriate legislation proved to be elusive and the MC-6 ended up being ahead of its time. It did not enter regular production until 1969 and only 100 were built, all for Greyhound. Because of their width, Greyhound was forced to limit the assignment of MC-6 coaches to special routes where permits or other regulations allowed the coaches to operate. The 102-inch width later became legal after the MC-6 coaches had left the Greyhound fleet.

Although the MC-6 itself was not produced in large numbers, it did influence the industry in several ways. It prompted Trailways to develop their Model 07 Eagle with a width of 102 inches. That was also built in limited numbers because of roadway width restrictions. Work on the MC-6 prompted the development of the MC-7 and subsequent MCI models which effectively brought the intercity bus industry into the 40-foot era. The MC-6 also helped in encouraging legislation to make the 102 inch width legal on federal highways in the mid-1980s.

What did happen is that MCI's work led to the development of the MC-7 and subsequent MC-8 and MC-9 models which dominated the industry for the next two decades. These three models have been underrated by history. The MC-7 was effectively a lengthened and strengthened MC-5A with a raised passenger area. It went into production in 1968, a year ahead of the MC-6. They effectively became Greyhound's replacement for the Scenicruisers and there are many people who rate the MC-7 as the next best coach to the Scenicruisers.

The MC-7, MC-8 and MC-9 were trend setters in several areas. Greyhound and Trailways had been operating 40-foot coaches since the 1950s, Prevost introduced a 40-foot coach in 1967 and GM introduced their 40-foot PD4903 in 1968. However, the MC-7 and subsequent MC-8 and MC-9 were undoubtedly the biggest influence in moving the intercity bus industry to 40-foot coaches. These three models were also the biggest influence in increasing MCI market share. Within a span of less than two decades, MCI went from a regional bus builder to capturing more than half of the domestic market in intercity coaches. In 1973, Greyhound began ordering coaches with automatic transmissions instead of stick shift. This

Here are two transition models that effectively passed the Greyhound bus building torch from General Motors to MCI. *Left:* MCI was acquired by Greyhound in 1958, but Greyhound continued to order GM coaches for several years. In 1966 and 1967, the PD4107 became the last GM model to enter the greyhound fleet. This example was photographed in Washington, D.C. in April of 1979. *Right:* While MCI coaches had been used by Greyhound of Canada for decades, the MC-5 was the first MCI model to enter service with Greyhound in the United States. This MC-5A was photographed leaving Chicago's underground Chicago terminal in April of 1979. The plain white paint indicated that the coach was one of a group up for sale. ROBERT REDDEN, REDDEN ARCHIVES.





Several people suggest that the MC-6 was originally intended to be a replacement for the aging Scenicruisers. It has an unusual design and pioneered the new 102-inch coach. When acceptance of the new width was not forthcoming, only 100 were built. They operated on special routes with permits. NBT.



The MC-7 went into production in 1968 and became MCI's first 40-foot coach. It effectively replaced the Scenicruisers in Greyhound's fleet and became popular with other operators. This example, with the "Super 7 Scenicruiser" logo, was photographed in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in September of 1979. ROBERT REDDEN, REDDEN ARCHIVES.

started with the last delivery of MC-7 coaches. Expectedly, the remainder of the industry followed.

While Greyhound was the largest user of the MC-7, MC-8 and MC-9, they were not exclusive models for Greyhound. If there was any time during Greyhound's history where it was obvious that the intercity bus industry was following its lead in regard to specific bus models, it would be during this MC-7, MC-8 and at least the start of the MC-9 era. In fact, MCI's sales grew so rapidly that they opened another manufacturing facility at Transportation Manufacturing Corp. in Roswell, New Mexico in the mid-1970s. Most of the Greyhound MC-8 and MC-9 coaches were built here over the following decade and were designated as TMC models.

The second half of the 1980s was a volatile time for Greyhound. It started off as a continuation of earlier years with Greyhound opting for the newest and most popular models. In late 1984, Greyhound began buying the new MCI 96A3 model and then switched to the 102-inch wide 102A3 when it became available in 1985. Purchases of the 102A3 continued into 1988 with more than 800 eventually entering the Greyhound fleet. As with the other models Greyhound had selected since the late 1960s, the 96A3 and then the 102A3 became the most popular models on the U.S. market and were ordered and operated by numerous other bus companies.

In late 1986, Greyhound Lines was purchased from Greyhound Corp. by an investor group headed by Fred Currey. Greyhound Lines then went on to purchase Trailways, Inc. in 1987 and acquired Eagle International which was then renamed Eagle Bus Manufacturing. In what must be considered a unique turn about, Greyhound took delivery of some new Eagles – a coach long associated with its major competitor,

Trailways. Purchases of new buses slowed down late in the decade as financial problems led to bankruptcy in 1990.

Greyhound's revitalization in the 1990s was helped along by a new model called the MC-12. Historically, I would rate the 719 and 743, the PD4104 and Scenicruiser, and the MC-6 as being revolutionary while the postwar PD3751/PD4151 Silversides and the MC-12 were refinements of existing technology. The postwar Silversides kept Greyhound going after the war until they could develop a new model. The MC-12 kept Greyhound going after their financial troubles until they could develop a new model.

Like the postwar Silversides, the MC-12 was simply an evolution of existing technology. Simplistically, the top half of the coach is an MC-9 with an improved roof cap while the bottom half is a 96A3. To some extent the MC-12 was an anachronism since it remained 96 inches wide and 40 feet long in an era when other bus operators were going to 102 inches and 45 feet. However, the MC-12 was highly compatible with the existing Greyhound fleet and proved to be an economical workhorse. It also incorporated certain Greyhound features not available on the standard MCI models.

Although technically available to other operators, the MC-12 was only ordered by

In an unusual turn of events, Greyhound acquired Trailways, Inc., the former Continental Trailways, and its Eagle manufacturing plant in 1987. The subsequent acquisition of new Eagle coaches by Greyhound brought both used and new Eagle coaches into the Greyhound fleet. This example was still operating for Greyhound when photographed in 1994. ROBERT REDDEN, REDDEN ARCHIVES.





Built from 1992 through 1999, the MC-12 model became the backbone of the Greyhound fleet in the late 1990s. With a width of 96 inches and a length of 40 feet, the MC-12 was more of a refinement of an existing design than a new development. This 1992 MC-12 was photographed at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in New York City on April 10, 2000. J.C. REBIS JR.



Originally introduced in 1978, the MC-9 went on to become the most popular intercity 40-foot coach of all time. It carried Greyhound through its trying times in the late 1980s. This MC-9 was new when it was photographed at the new Greyhound terminal in Portland, Maine in August of 1979 while on a run from New York City to Bangor. ROBERT REDDEN, REDDEN ARCHIVES.

Greyhound and affiliates as a seated coach. It was also built as a prisoner transportation vehicle after the MC-9 ceased production. Expectedly, the MC-12 did not exert much influence on the charter and tour operators who went their own way at this time with other models. However, even though the intercity bus operators purchased different models, MCI retained a majority share of new coach sales in the U.S. and Canada.

In the late 1990s, Greyhound purchased some MCI 40-foot 102D3 and 45-foot 102DL3 coaches. While Greyhound had operated wide coaches in the past (including the MC-6 and 102A3), this was their first venture into 45 foot coaches.

The story behind Greyhound's current model, the G4500, dates back to 1996. Although Greyhound continues to look at other makes and models of buses, Greyhound and MCI began working on developing a new model suitable for Greyhound's needs. Floyd Holland, Greyhound's senior vice president of operations, headed a team out of Greyhound's home office in Dallas while Virgil Hoogestraat headed the MCI engineering team out of Roswell, New Mexico. What resulted was the new MCI "G" series which was designed to be built at MCI's facility in Sahagun, Mexico.

A total of 25 41-foot G4100 coaches were initially built and tested in revenue service by Greyhound and other operators. After the initial test period, Greyhound elected to go with a 45-foot coach which was given model number G4500. In May of 2001, Greyhound began taking delivery of new G4500 coaches.

Unlike some earlier models, the G4500 is not an exclusive model for Greyhound but is available to other intercity coach operators. The first non-Greyhound orders were received in late 2001. An interesting side note

about the "G" series MCI is that it probably has the most road testing of any bus prior to production. The early road tests of the G4100 coaches involved 2.6 million miles and the G4500 later went through 4.1 million miles of road tests.

Is the G4500 revolutionary such as the 719, Scenicruiser and MC-6 or is it merely evolutionary such as the postwar Silversides and the MC-12? I think it is both. On the one hand, the G4500 borrows a little bit of styling from the top-of-the-line E4500 and some of the componentry from the tried-and-true D4500. While this is the first time that Greyhound got involved with the design of a 102-inch wide 45-foot coach, those dimensions

have been typical in the intercity bus industry for a decade.

On the other hand, there are a lot of features on the G4500 which could be classed as new or improved. Both the suspension system and the cooling system have had major improvements to make them more practical and easier to maintain. There are numerous changes in and around the engine to reduce maintenance and simplify daily service. The luggage compartments are more open and have a higher capacity. Several electrical items are state-of-the-art including LED type lights and daytime running lights. I also note that the "G" has more stainless steel than the "D."

During the gap between the end of MC-12 production and start of the "G" series, Greyhound purchased other models including the 102D3 and the 102DL3. This example of the 102DL3 was photographed on West 29th Street near 12th Avenue in New York City on April 18, 2001. The 102DL3 was the first 45-foot model purchased by Greyhound. J.C. REBIS JR.



Will the rest of the intercity bus industry follow Greyhound in regard to the G4500? There is no question that the industry continues to follow Greyhound's lead in regard to manufacturer. More than half of the new intercity coaches sold in the U.S. and Canada come from MCI and their market share increased as high as 60 percent in 2001 after Greyhound started taking delivery of the G4500. I would also predict that, if only because of its width and length, you will find more independent operators buying the G4500 than bought the MC-12 although I doubt if the "G" will replace the "D" in being the most popular model on the market.

It is interesting to note that the remainder of the intercity bus industry may well be following Greyhound's lead in regard to the philosophy behind the G4500. When Greyhound and MCI began working on the "G" model concept in 1996 their goals were to develop a simple yet serviceable coach that carried a reasonable price tag. I note that as early as 2000, the less expensive and simpler coach models on the market began to increase in popularity. Hence, it is clear that the intercity bus industry is following Greyhound's lead to economy and simplicity. Will this develop into an industry trend? It is too early to say, but we certainly can watch things in the years ahead to see whether Greyhound remains an industry leader. □

Although MCI's new "G" model was not exclusive for Greyhound, the company did have a great deal to do with the original design and testing. Several months were spent road testing 25 of the 41-foot G4100 model coaches before the "G" model went into regular production. Here, May 31 of 2001 found this G4100 parked at the Greyhound lot on 30th Street at 12th Avenue in New York City. J.C. REBIS JR.



Although Greyhound had a great deal to do with the design and testing of the new "G" model, it is also being operated by other companies. This G4500 is being operated by Trans-Bridge Lines, Inc. It was photographed on West 41st Street in New York City on September 15, 2001. J.C. REBIS JR.



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