

MCI Coaches from A to J

by Larry Plachno

Ground zero for the new MCI lettered models came in December of 1984 at a bus show in Salt Lake City, Utah, when MCI officially introduced their new 96A3. While continuing with much of the tried and true systems of the MC-9, the new "A" model offered exterior styling which was more appealing to tour and charter operators in this new era of deregulation. This photo of the demo 96A3 was taken during the Salt Lake City show when MCI's Bob Kane and the NATIONAL BUS TRADER staff took the new coach out for a photo session. ROBERT REDDEN, REDDEN ARCHIVES.



We have received several requests from readers for information on MCI's new coach models designated by letters. MCI has been so active recently that such a request has a great deal of merit. After using a model numbering scheme for more than 15 years, MCI switched to a new model numbering plan in 2000. In addition, four new MCI models made or are making their debuts in 2000 or 2001. At least six different MCI models are expected to be in production in 2001. This is a new record for MCI since it represents five totally distinct models plus variations in length or width.

To respond to reader requests, we put together this brief review of the various MCI

models designated by letters since the "A" series was introduced in the mid-1980s. While the initial three models are no longer available, the remaining models from the "D" through the "J" are expected to be in regular production in 2001.

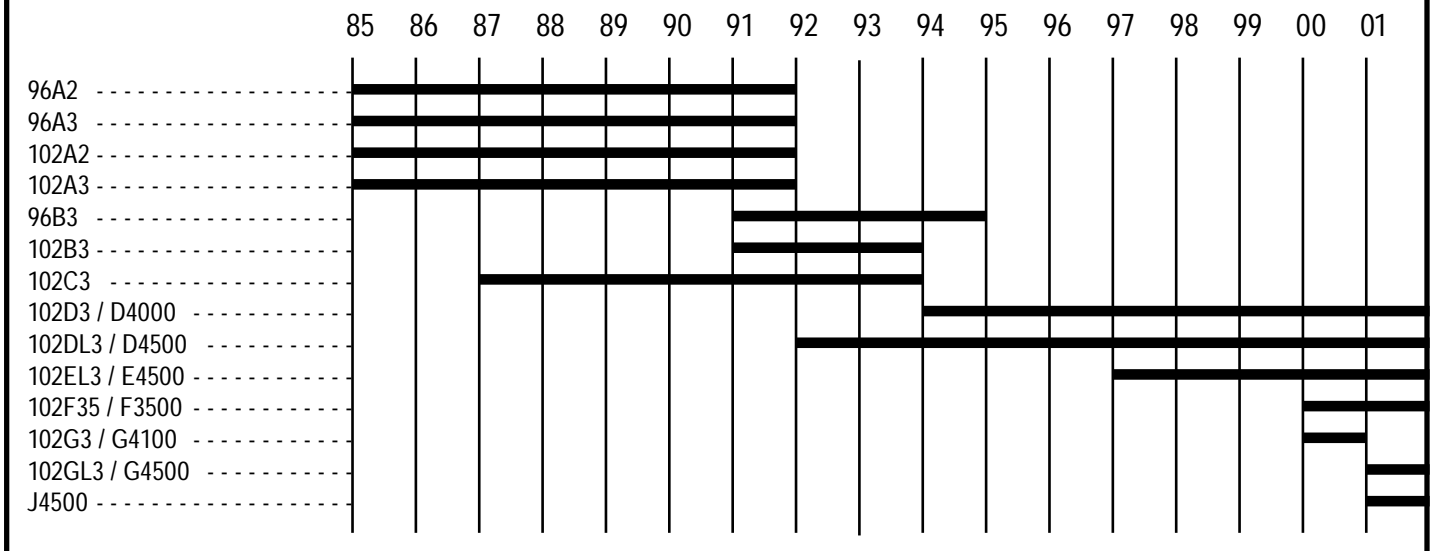
The previous series of MCI coaches started with the MC-1 which entered regular production in 1959. Technically, this series did not end until 1999 when the last MC-12 was built. However, since the MC-12 was predominately ordered by Greyhound for regular line run use, the series effectively ended with the MC-9 which was introduced in late 1978. With the elimination of the 35-foot coach in 1980, the MC-9 was the sole

coach produced at MCI for a few years. It remained in production for 11 years and a total of 9,513 coaches were built, making it the all-time most popular intercity coach model in the U.S. and Canada.

A is for Appealing

It can be argued that MCI did not need a new model and series at this time. The MC-9 was easily the most popular intercity coach of all time and accounted for more than half of all intercity coach sales in the United States. However, recent deregulation made the industry more conscious of design, and some operators began talking about European styling. As a result, MCI offered

Production Years for MCI Models A through J



their new "A" model which retained some of the tried-and-true components of the MC-9 while incorporating new technology. Many operators considered it more appealing since the "A" model moved away from the traditional scheduled bus service design.

MCI also introduced a new model numbering scheme at this time which was partially based on coach width because of the forthcoming move to wider coaches. The new model numbers incorporated three distinct parts. The first two or three numbers (96 or 102) indicated the width of the model in inches. Then came a letter starting with "A" to designate the basic model. The final number, either a 2 or 3, indicated the number of axles.

The new 96A3 and 96A2 were officially introduced at the same bus industry convention in Salt Lake City in late 1984 which witnessed the debut of the new Setra and LAG coaches from Europe. Deliveries started in early 1985. Later that year the wide body versions were introduced and marketed as models 102A3 and 102A2.

Although MCI introduced their "C" series in the form of the 102C3 in late 1987, the "A" models were technically replaced by the "B" models in 1991. Due to the lack of operator interest in a narrow coach with two axles, the 96A2 was discontinued without a replacement model. In 1991, the 96A3 was replaced by the 96B3 and the 102A3 was replaced by the 102B3. The two-axle 102A2 continued briefly in production as the last "A" series model because a two-axle version of the "B" series was never offered.

C is for Coach

Introduced in late 1987, the "C" model was put into production prior to the "B" model. Only one model was offered, the

102C3. Although similar in appearance to the 102A3, the new 102C3 was intended to be a top-of-the-line coach for tours and quality charters. Perhaps the most noteworthy feature of the 102C3 was its fully paintable exterior. This not only marked a major departure from decades of stainless steel silversiding, but it also took a major step toward European styling. The coach interior was also improved with higher passenger headroom, a more open interior, and improved parcel racks.

With the introduction of the 102C3, MCI offered six different models in three basic groups. The 102C3 was the top of the line

and intended for high quality charters and tours. In the middle were the four different "A" series models offering combinations of 102- and 96-inch width with either two or three axles. The MC-9 remained in production as the bread and butter scheduled service coach.

The 102C3 did offer a few new features. It had a redesigned dash to accommodate the new tilt and telescopic steering wheel. New seats were developed for the 102C3 which provided more knee room plus a lower profile. This enhanced passenger visibility and gave the coach more of an open appearance. Some of the optional seats

The 102C3 was introduced in 1987 as an upscale version of the 102A3 with more amenities for tour and higher quality charter service. Noteworthy features included new parcel racks, a more open interior and this fully paintable exterior. This photo of a 1989 102C3 was taken in New York City in January of 1996. J.C. REBIS JR.



offered little stirrups below the seat cushions to assist shorter passengers in reaching the parcel racks.

After the "B" series replaced the "A" in 1991, the 102C3 remained in production briefly. The last 102C3 was delivered in December of 1993 when it was officially replaced by the 102D3.

B is for Bus

The "B" series is probably the least known and shortest-lived of any of the MCI lettered models. There were two models in this series, both introduced in 1991. The 96B3 replaced the 96A3 while the 102B3 replaced the 102A3. Because of other MCI models, neither of the two "B" models achieved a great deal of fame. The 102C3 had been the most popular 40-foot model for a few years, and the new 45-foot 102DL3 was being introduced at this time and soon would become MCI's most popular model. Hence, both the "C" and "D" models overshadowed the "B" in sales.

While the "B" may have been a wallflower at the dance it had nothing to be ashamed of. Like the "A" models it replaced, the 96B3 and 102B3 had a good reputation for durability and reliability. Many went into scheduled service or conventional charter service. Although intended as a simple bus with traditional stainless steel siding, the 102B3 soon became available with options.

To a large extent, the 102B3 shared a similar fate with the 102C3. Both models had engine compartments too small to accommodate the new Series 60 engine. In addition,



Originally developed as a handicapped-accessible coach in 1988, the 45-foot 102DL3 went into regular production in late 1992 and soon became MCI's most popular model – a distinction it still retains. In addition to the 45-foot length, the 102DL3 offered the new Series 60 engine and a steerable tag axle to decrease turning radius. This example of the 102DL3 is operated by Peter Pan Bus Lines and was photographed in New York City in August of 1998. J.C. REBIS JR.

tion, the distinction between the "B" and "C" models started to blur after a few years. Operators began ordering the 102C3 with stainless steel siding and the 102B3 with painted sides. MCI made the logical decision and replaced both models with the new "D" series. The 45-foot 102DL3 appeared in 1992, and the 40-foot 102D3, which was the actual replacement for the 102B3 and 102C3, was introduced in January of 1994. The last 102B3 was delivered in December of 1993.

Another noteworthy improvement with the "D" series was better weight distribution. With the "D" models, the fuel tank, air conditioner compartment and central heat were moved toward the rear of the coach to put more weight on the drive axle and less on the front axle.

It is interesting that the 96B3 lingered in production briefly because a 96-inch wide version of the "D" model was not offered. The last 96B3 was delivered in February of 1994. With the recent order for 96-inch wide coaches for New Jersey, MCI will again build some 96-inch coaches. This time they will be "D" models.

D is for Durability

The "D" model is a major turning point in our list. The three earlier models, the "A," "B" and "C" are no longer in production. However, the "D" and all following models mentioned here are either in production or are expected to start regular production in 2001.

MCI's "D" series actually traces its heritage back to 1988 when the Canadian government gave MCI a grant to develop a prototype handicapped-accessible intercity coach. First displayed in May of 1990, the prototype coach had a rear wheelchair lift plus a large accessible restroom at the rear. Passage of legislation in December of 1991 made the 45-foot length legal in the United States and opened the door for regular production.

The 45-foot version of the "D" was introduced first. A prototype was shown at a bus show in February of 1992, although, regu-

The "B" models replaced the "A" models after the 102C3 was already in production. Both a 96-inch and a 102-inch wide version of the "B" were offered. This 96B3 was operated by Frank Martz Coach Lines and was photographed in New York City in 1995. J.C. REBIS JR.



lar production did not start until October. Model number 102DL3 was assigned, with the "L" for "long" being added to designate the 45-foot length. Noteworthy features of the new model were the steerable tag axle to reduce turning radius and a larger engine compartment to accommodate the new Series 60 engine.

A companion 40-foot model prototype was given model number 102D3 and first

displayed in January of 1994. It effectively replaced both the 102B3 and 102C3 models which had engine compartments too small to accommodate the new Series 60 engine.

These two "D" series coaches have attained an enviable reputation for durability. It can be said that they represent an uncountable number of hours of engineering and testing work which goes back to 1959 and the first MC-1. Numerous owners

have called the "D" models "bulletproof" because of their outstanding operating performance. Both "D" coach models are still in production today, although, they are now called the D4000 and D4500. The D4500 has been the most popular intercity coach on the U.S. and Canadian markets for several years.

E is for Elegant

With the "E" model, MCI made a clean break with the past. It did not replace a previous model but rather signalled a change from earlier models and a totally new direction. More than three years of research and design work went into developing this totally new model. The resulting coach was not only technologically advanced but also had an attractive new appearance, hence, MCI dubbed it their Renaissance® model.

Only one model has been built, the 102EL3 (now the E4500). While it has similar basic dimensions to the 102DL3 with a width of 102 inches and a length of 45 feet, the 102EL3 is substantially different. The 102EL3 requires a reduced number of parts and is built on a different assembly line which has fewer work stations than the 102DL3. The 102EL3 has a completely new and very strong integral frame structure. Perhaps its best feature is the modern exterior styling and the innovative curving passenger stepwell.

Regular production of the 102EL3 started in September of 1997 at MCI's facilities in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Pembina, North Dakota. It is marketed as MCI's top-of-the-line tour and charter coach and is currently MCI's best selling conversion shell. It is noteworthy that the design and styling of the 102EL3 became so popular that the following "G" and "J" models matched it to a significant extent.

F is for Flexible

Built at MCI's facility in Mexico, the "F" series coach has a very interesting heritage. From the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, the Flexible company of Loudonville, Ohio, built several 35-foot coaches which were particularly popular with smaller operators because of their durability, economical operation and ease of maintenance. The torsilastic suspension system provided an excellent ride. When production ended in Ohio, Dina was licensed to build a similar coach at their plant in Mexico because these same features were also highly prized by Mexican bus operators.

This model was originally known as the Dina model 330, and considerably more were built in Mexico than had been built in the United States. Dina improved the model slightly as the Avante and even developed a 40-foot version. When production ceased a few years ago, the Mexican operators demanded a replacement integral model

The 102EL3 (now the E4500) is a totally new bus engineered from input received from bus owners, drivers and passengers. Noteworthy features include the attractive exterior styling and the curving entranceway. This example was operated by Elwood City Transit and was photographed in New York City in July of 1999. J.C. REBIS JR.



Built at MCI's facility in Mexico, the 35-foot F3500 was originally planned and built as a conversion shell. However, it is now finding a great deal of popularity as a limo coach and as a durable alternative to medium-duty buses. This example was converted by Custom Coach and was photographed at the FMCA convention in Brunswick, Maine, in August of 2000. NBT PHOTO BY LARRY PLACHNO.



with durability, economical operation and ease of maintenance. MCI engineers complied and the resulting coach became known as the "F" model in MCI's model scheme.

Although also offered as a 40-foot coach in Mexico, only the two-axle 35-foot version has been offered to the U.S. market. Known by several different designations including the F12, this model is now being offered as the F3500. Major features include the torsion suspension, an economical selling price, and the same features that made the Flexible popular.

The F12 was originally offered as a conversion shell where it was felt that its short length and economical price would contrast with the larger conversion shells with much higher prices. Conversion shell production started in the summer of 2000 while seated coach production started in late 2000. What is interesting is that the F3500 turned out to be very flexible and has enjoyed more popularity as a seated coach than many of us expected. Limo operators are purchasing the coach with two-and-one seating as an obvious step up from a standard limo in capacity. Conventional bus operators are purchasing the coach as a replacement for medium-duty smaller buses because the F3500 has substantially greater reliability for longer trips.

G is for Greyhound

While MCI will sell the new "G" model to anyone, it was planned from the start as a durable and economical line-haul coach. It was not unexpected that Greyhound



Produced at the MCI facility in Mexico, the new "G" series coaches are designed for rugged line haul service but have attractive new styling similar to the "E" model. However, an option package is available to upgrade the "G" to an economical charter and tour coach. This example of the G4100 was photographed at the recent UMA Motorcoach Expo in Atlantic City in February 2001. NBT PHOTO BY LARRY PLACHNO.

would become heavily involved in the design of this model.

Produced at MCI's facility in Mexico, the "G" model incorporates some of the design features of the E4500 including a similar exterior styling. However, the entry stepwell on the "G" is not quite as curved as on the E4500. In addition, the 45-foot "G" model (initially to be designated as the 102GL3) has a fixed tag axle instead of the steerable tag

axle found on the E4500. This gives the G4500 a larger turning radius than the E4500 but compensates by reducing one possible maintenance area.

Initially, two different "G" models were proposed: a 41-foot 102G3 and a 45-foot 102GL3. Greyhound initially was interested in the shorter coach as a replacement for the MC-12 coaches it has been buying in recent years. MCI elected to invest in an extensive preproduction testing program and built 25 prototype 102G3 (now G4100) coaches. Of these, 17 went to Greyhound for testing and the others went to various operators. After 1.5 million miles of actual on-road use, none of the coaches has had power train problems or tire failures.

In addition to the actual testing, two other things developed from this preproduction program. One is that Greyhound has opted for the 45-foot G4500 model instead of the G4100 model. Hence, there is now a question of whether the G4100 model will see actual production. If not, the 25 prototypes may be the only example of this model. The second development is that Greyhound has provided substantial input into the G4500, some of which I find to be impressive.

For those of you who are interested, MCI will be offering a "Premium Comfort Group" option on the G4500. It includes parcel rack doors, fabric trim everywhere, video, and an AM-FM radio plus CD player which effectively turns the durable line-haul G4500 coach into an economical tour and charter coach. Regular production of the G4500 is expected to start in March or April of 2001.

The new "G" model also comes in a 45-foot length as the G4500. It features a fixed tag axle and a circular entranceway less pronounced than on the "E" and "J" models. The Greyhound influence is obvious in some of the systems. This example of the G4500 was photographed at the recent UMA show in Atlantic City. NBT PHOTO BY LARRY PLACHNO.



H and I are for Heedful and Integer

Many of you probably already know that MCI skipped "H" and "I" in its letter model scheme.

The reason behind skipping "H" is obvious because of the well-known "H" series coaches produced and sold by Prevost Car. This is a credit to both Prevost and MCI. It is a credit to Prevost because the action acknowledges the importance of Prevost's "H" series. It is also a credit to MCI because in skipping this letter, MCI was heedful of possible confusion in the industry if they also used "H" as a model designation.

MCI also skipped the letter "I" for a totally different reason. In some applications, particularly computer applications, the letter "I" is skipped because it could possibly be confused with the number one. MCI elected to skip the letter "I" for similar reasons.

This is a good place to mention that after approximately 16 years of use, MCI decided to change model numbering schemes in 2000. When the previous model scheme was developed in 1984, both coach width and the number of axles were important. The original MCI "A" model was available with both 96-inch and 102-inch widths and with both two and three axles. By the turn of the century, all MCI coaches longer than 35 feet were built with three axles and all (except for the one special order from New Jersey) were 102 inches wide.

MCI's new model scheme emphasizes the letter model and length in feet but allows room for future model variations. It is interesting that MCI elected to start their first model with "00" while the old General Motors numbering scheme always started with "01." The 102DL3 became the D4500 while the 102D3 became the D4000. The 102EL3 became the E4500, the F Series coach



There is also a 40-foot version of the "D" model. Introduced as the 102D3, it is now known as the D4000. First offered in 1994, it is still in production today. This example operated for Adirondack Trailways and was photographed in New York City in July of 1996. J.C. REBIS JR.

became the F3500, the 102GL3 became the G4500, and the 102G3 became the G4100.

Those of us involved with model number trivia have been waiting to see what MCI did with a model number for the new 96-inch wide and 40-foot long "D" series coaches being built for New Jersey. Under the old model numbering scheme, they would have most likely become model 96D3. I am told that MCI will now designate them as model D4000N with the "N" standing for "Narrow."

J is for Joining

The newest MCI model is the J4500 which was introduced at the recent UMA Motor-

coach Expo in Atlantic City in February of 2001. My understanding is that the J4500 resulted from substantial requests by MCI customers. Some coach operators wanted the less complex technology of the "D" model, the attractive design of the "E" model plus a more economical price. Initially, this sounds like an impossible or at least improbable wish list. However, the MCI engineers sat down at their computers and achieved all of this with the new J4500.

Slated for production at Winnipeg and Pembina, the J4500 is indeed a joining of the best attributes of two of MCI's models. It has the traditional durable componentry of the "D" series backed by years of engineering and uncountable miles of actual



The J4500 is MCI's newest model. It is an interesting composite of the "D" series systems, the "E" series attractive design and an economical price. The coach made its debut at the recent UMA show in Atlantic City in February of 2001 which is where this photo was taken. NBT PHOTO BY LARRY PLACHNO.

use. On the other hand, it has the exciting styling of the "E" series with its modern exterior and curved entryway. In addition, the J4500 will be in a market position below that of the top-of-the-line E4500 but above the durable line-haul G4500. While the E4500 has disk brakes and a steerable tag axle, the J4500 will have drum brakes and a fixed tag axle.

Several operators have indicated that this is a good combination of features at a good price. John Mankin of Ozark Trailways Charter & Tours was so impressed he bought the first J4500 even before it was shown to the public. The J4500 is expected to start regular production in April of 2001.

As a result of having received so many questions from readers, I have put together a little chart of the six major models that MCI expects to be marketing in 2001. I have excluded the 96-inch "D" model for New Jersey because it is unique; and have omitted the G4100 since it may not go into regular production.

Note that there are three levels of conventional coaches separated by coach length and price. There are also three levels of advanced design coaches which are separated by intended use and price. However, all three of the models indicated are 45 feet long. What is interesting is that the top two models in each column are built in Winnipeg

and Pembina while the models at the bottom of each column are built at MCI's facilities in Mexico.

Hopefully, all of this gives you some idea of MCI's current product line and some of the basic differences between the models. □

MCI Product Line in 2001	
Conventional	Advanced
D4500 <i>45 feet long Longest</i>	E4500 <i>45 feet long Top of the Line</i>
D4000 <i>40 feet long Mid-size</i>	J4500 <i>45 feet long Intermediate</i>
F3500 <i>35 feet long Shortest</i>	G4500 <i>45 feet long line & charter</i>

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