

Van Hool Coaches



Now Running in Scheduled Service

by Larry Plachno

ABC Bus recently delivered 29 Van Hool C2045 coaches to three Greyhound subsidiaries to be used in line-haul service. This ushers the C2045 into an exclusive club reserved for only the strongest and most durable coaches. One of the 11 coaches going to TNM&O was photographed at ABC Bus in Winter Garden, Florida, prior to delivery. ABC BUS.

One of the most interesting recent developments in the intercity coach business is the recent selection of the new Van Hool C2045 coach for scheduled line-haul service. Three different Greyhound subsidiaries recently made the decision to purchase a total of 29 45-foot Van Hool coaches for scheduled service. Included in this group are TNM&O of Lubbock, Texas, Valley Transit of Harlingen, Texas, and Golden State Transportation in Los Angeles.

The fact that three Greyhound subsidiaries made the decision to purchase the C2045 is quite a feather in the Van Hool cap. In each case, the operating company decided to purchase and to put the C2045 coaches into regular line-haul service. This is not only a substantial vote of confidence in the C2045, but it also ushers the C2045 into a rather exclusive club reserved for only the strongest and most durable coaches which can withstand the rigors of running scheduled line-haul service.

What with the current charter and tour emphasis in the intercity bus industry, many people may not realize the impact of this decision, and the vote of confidence it gives to the C2045. Our bus industry has changed substantially since I purchased my first bus

back in 1963, and scheduled service has been one of the biggest changes.

In contrast to today's business, the early operations of the intercity bus industry were primarily scheduled service. It was not until September of 1928 that Pioneer Yellowway Stages introduced the first scheduled coast-to-coast bus service. The new San Francisco-New York trip took five days and 14 hours in those pre-expressway days.

Back in those early years, most intercity bus companies purchased body-on-chassis buses. Actually, a distinct bus chassis for intercity bus service did not become available until 1925. While some of these body-on-chassis buses seemed to last forever, the ones in heavy-duty scheduled service did not. The owner of one of the larger long distance bus operations at this time said that he was lucky to get more than three years of heavy-duty service from one of these early body-on-chassis buses. Then, as now, the scheduled service operators were looking for durability and reliability.

The situation changed substantially during the 1940s. General Motors developed what we now call integral construction in the late 1930s which led to the

production of buses which were vastly superior in durability to body-on-chassis types. When GM introduced their new air ride PD4104 coach in 1953 it was so vastly superior for scheduled service that the other manufacturers had a difficult time facing this competition.

By the end of the decade virtually all of the smaller intercity bus manufacturers had quit. GM continued to supply the bus needs for Greyhound as it had since 1930. They also supplied most of the larger intercity bus operators with intercity coaches. Trailways and affiliates began buying the Eagle which had been introduced in 1958, and the remaining bus manufacturers tended to sell to a few smaller bus companies.

Hence, to a large extent, the history of the bus industry and particularly the larger operators, other than Trailways, is tied to GM coaches during this period. The obvious reason for this is the GM coaches could withstand the rigors of operating heavy-duty scheduled line-haul service. When GM quit building intercity coaches in 1980, most operators who had not already switched to MCI coaches did so. Again, the reason was obvious. MCI produced a durable coach which could run heavy-duty scheduled line-

haul service on a day-to-day basis. Other makes and models also had success in scheduled service including the Prevost LeMirage, the Setra and the Dina.

With deregulation in 1982, the bus industry turned a major corner when charter and tour operations suddenly amounted to more than half of intercity bus operations. What transpired at this point is that the intercity bus industry started to use different coaches for different applications. The favorite for tours and charters were coaches with some European styling, American components, and extra passenger amenities.

However, with the scheduled service operators, durability was still the key. Greyhound opted for the MC1MC-12, effectively a composite of the MC-9 and 96A3. Although more traditional than modern, the MC-12 was certainly a good choice for scheduled service and obviously very durable. Many other scheduled service operators opted for the MCI "D" series which is a younger cousin to the MC-12 with a little more styling.

All of this leads us to the current situation. What should a Greyhound subsidiary order for scheduled service in 2000? Greyhound itself was waiting for new MCI "G" series, but that was still in testing and not yet in regular production. What is interesting is that all three of these Greyhound subsidiaries opted for the Van Hool C2045. Here are the individual stories.

TNM&O

Texas, New Mexico & Oklahoma Coaches of Lubbock, Texas, which is better known as TNM&O, celebrated its 60th anniversary in 1999. The company was originally founded on May 31, 1939, as the result of a merger. A small share in the new company was held by R.C. Bowen who went on to found Bowen Motor Coaches, the forerunner of Continental Trailways. The original owners, Mr. and Mrs. Joe Bowman, sold out to Greyhound in 1967. Because of a dispute over exclusive route authority, Trailways purchased 39 percent of the company, making TNM&O unusual in being owned by both Greyhound and Trailways.

Following the change of ownership, the company expanded through acquisitions. Carlsbad Caverns Coaches from Carlsbad, New Mexico, was purchased in 1967. In 1984, the company nearly doubled in size with the acquisition of Roswell-based New Mexico Transportation Company.

Other expansions took place as recently as March of 1987. At that time routes from Amarillo to Dallas, Texas, were expanded and routes from Amarillo to Pueblo, Colorado, were added. Routes from Albuquerque, New Mexico, to Raton and Farm-



All three of the companies that purchased the C2045 coaches have a history of providing rugged scheduled line-haul service in their respective areas of operation. TNM&O already celebrated its 60th anniversary of scheduled service operation, and Valley Transit will reach the six decade mark in 2001. This photo shows one of the eight Van Hool C2045 coaches which were recently delivered to Valley Transit in Harlingen, Texas. ABC BUS.



The date was February of 1980, and this TNM&O MC-9 was loading for a run to San Antonio. The MC-9 was brand new at this time, and the paint scheme reflected the obvious Greyhound ownership. All of the MC-9 coaches are now gone from the TNM&O fleet. ROBERT REDDEN, REDDEN ARCHIVES.



January of 1979 found this GM coach about to leave the Valley Transit yard for a run to Brownsville. Like many scheduled line-haul carriers, Valley Transit was loyal to GM for many years before switching to MCI equipment. These GM coaches are long gone from the Valley Transit fleet. ROBERT REDDEN, REDDEN ARCHIVES.



One of the 11 new Van Hool coaches for TNM&O was photographed at ABC Bus in Winter Garden, Florida, prior to delivery. If you look closely, you can see the door for the Steward & Stevenson lift behind the tag axle. Other features of the coach include an Isringhausen model 6800 driver's seat, a flush type toilet and a central locking system. ABC BUS.

ington, both in northern New Mexico, also became a part of the TNM&O route structure. In 1991, the routes from Raton and Pueblo to Denver were added.

Trailways ownership ended in 1984 when its stock was repurchased as treasury stock. When the Greyhound Corporation sold Greyhound Lines, Inc. to GLI Holdings, Inc., TNM&O was not included. However, GLI Holdings, Inc. exercised an option to purchase TNM&O coaches in 1988. It continues to operate as a separate company and has retained its own identity.

The backbone of the current TNM&O fleet is 43 40-foot MCI 102D3 coaches. There are also 21 102C3 coaches in operation plus eight of the 45-foot 102DL3 models. Because of special applications, the fleet also includes three Blue Bird EZ loaders. Recently, TNM&O placed an order for 11 2001 model C2045L Van Hool coaches.

TNM&O opted for the 370 horsepower Detroit Series 60 engine with an Allison B500 transmission and a Jake Brake. The "L" in the model number stands for "lift" and means that all 11 coaches are equipped with a Stewart & Stevenson "Baylift" wheelchair lift.

The driver sits on an Isringhausen model 6800 seat while 57 passengers will be accommodated on Amaya Brasil seats with sliders and two tie-down positions. Other passenger amenities include an REI four-monitor entertainment system. Special equipment includes a Proheat "Bravo" engine pre-heater, a Monogram flush type toilet and a supplementary holding tank. Among other coach features are Lucas disc brakes, ZF variable ratio steering, LED marker lights, Automatic Traction Control, and a central locking system.

Coaches were painted in standard Greyhound colors and logos and were turned

over to TNM&O at the ABC Bus facility in Orlando. The people from TNM&O indicated that they picked the Van Hool C2045 because they feel that it is "built more for line-haul operation as opposed to a tour operation type coach." The new C2045 coaches will be used sparingly in charter service and will be used primarily on TNM&O's Denver-Dallas line-haul route.

Valley Transit Company

Vance D. Raimond founded Valley Airfield Bus Company on September 1, 1941, which operated a four-mile route from downtown Harlingen, Texas, to the Air Force Base which subsequently became Valley International Airport. With the advent of World War II, the little company found itself in the right place at the right time. A second route was soon started between Moore Field in Edenburg to McAllen, Texas. The com-

pany then went on to connect major communities in the Rio Grande Valley and adopted the name Valley Transit Co.

Robert G. Farris joined Valley Transit in 1955 after law school and serving in Korea. He was elected president in 1960, and, in 1973, he made Valley Transit's first application for route authority outside of the Rio Grande Valley. The company then began expanding north into Central Texas. The first such route, to San Antonio, was instituted on July 15, 1975. A route from the Valley to Houston started in June of 1981, Brownsville-Laredo was added in July of 1982 and Austin to the Valley in 1993. The original family owned the company until August of 1997. At that time it became a wholly-owned subsidiary of Greyhound.

Valley Transit operated Ford pushers and Beavers in the 1940s and early '50s. The com-

Three of the eight new Van Hool C2045 coaches were photographed at ABC Bus in Winter Garden, Florida, prior to delivery. The people from Valley Transit indicate that these coaches will be "the first coaches in South Texas with 57-passenger seating and theater quality digital audio/video entertainment systems." All of the coaches have a 370-horsepower Detroit Diesel engine, flush toilets and Amaya Gaudi seats. ABC BUS.



pany purchased its first GM coach in 1958 with the PD4104 and later operated other GM models including the 4108 and 4905. In 1979, the company switched over to MCI coaches and, subsequently, operated several models including the MC-9, 96A3 and 102A3. Another major equipment turn came in 1996 when Valley Transit traded used coaches for 27 Dina coaches. In early 2000, 21 Blue Bird buses were purchased for local operations. The current fleet as of late 2000 includes 22 MCI MC-9 coaches, five 96A3 coaches, 27 Dinas, and 21 Blue Birds.

In October of 2000, Valley Transit made the decision to add eight Van Hool C2045 coaches to its fleet. For their drive train, the company selected the 370 horsepower Detroit Series 60 engine, the Allison B500 transmission and a Jake Brake. An Isringhausen 6000 seat is provided for the driver while 57 passengers will sit in comfort on Amaya Gaudi seats. An REI four-monitor entertainment system is also provided.

Other features include a Proheat "Bravo" engine pre-heater, a Monogram flush type toilet, and a supplementary restroom holding tank. Included also are Automatic Traction Control, Lucas disc brakes, ZF variable ratio steering, LED marker lights and a central locking system.

Valley Transit and Greyhound chose the Van Hool C2045 "because of the state-of-the-art technology, low operating cost, ease of maintenance and the great customer acceptance," said Bobby Farris, Valley Transit's current president and third generation to head the company. Valley Transit's Van Hools will be the first coaches in South Texas with 57-passenger seating and "theater quality" digital audio/video entertainment systems. Valley Transit will use the Van Hool coaches to run charters and the longer, regular routes. Current plans are to convert all long haul and charter service with over-the-road coaches to Van Hools in the future.



This new Van Hool C2045 was one of the 10 recently delivered to Golden State Transportation Company. What is interesting is that the coach now shares this garage with standard Greyhound coaches. The C2045 coaches join a fleet which includes MCI coaches as well as a substantial number of Dina Viaggio coaches and several of the Greyhound MC-12 units. ABC BUS.

Golden State Transportation Company

Golden State has a history going back 20 years under the same management. Francisco Gonzalez first got into the transportation business in 1980 as an owner-operator by running his eight-passenger family Suburban between Los Angeles and Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. In 1982, Gonzalez and his wife, Josefa, founded their own company. The following year saw them begin operations under the Golden State name with a fleet consisting of two 15-passenger vans plus the original Suburban. By 1986, the fleet had grown to include 10 vans, three minibuses and three MC-7 coaches purchased from ABC Bus. Another route was added between Los Angeles and Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico.

Operations expanded quickly. By 1989, the company had buses running to Oxnard and Fresno and had added MC-5 and MC-8 coaches to the fleet. In 1998, 51 percent of the company's stock was purchased by a fully-owned subsidiary of Greyhound Lines known as Sistema Internacional de Transporte de Autobuses (SITA). On January 1, 2000, a Mexican company by the name of Crucero S.A. de C.V. was purchased which gave Golden State the ability to provide direct service between the United States and Ciudad Obregon, Sonora, Mexico.

Today, Golden State transports approximately one million passengers per year while remaining operated and managed by the Gonzalez family. Intercity bus service is



This C2045 was photographed shortly after delivery to Golden State Transportation Company which is based in Los Angeles, California. All of the 10 new C2045 coaches have Detroit Diesel engines and Allison automatic transmissions. Van Hool seating for 59 passengers is provided and special features include an REI four-monitor video system as well as a Monogram flush toilet. ABC BUS.

provided in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Utah, Oregon, Washington and Nevada with 205 daily schedules, 138 buses and 500 full-time hard working employees.

A total of 54 45-foot MCI 102DL3 coaches and 52 Dina Viaggio coaches make up the backbone of the Golden State fleet. In addition, there are five MCI 102A3 coaches and 15 MC-12 coaches. The company recently purchased 10 new Van Hool C2045 coaches. Golden State selected the 400 horsepower Detroit Series 60 engine, an Allison B500 transmission and a Jake Brake. The driver will sit on an Isringhausen 6000 seat while the interior will accommodate 59 passengers in Van Hool seating. A REI four-monitor video system will be included.

Other equipment includes a Proheat "Bravo" engine pre-heater, a Monogram flush toilet and a supplementary restroom holding tank. Among the other features of the coach are Automatic Traction Control, Lucas disc brakes, ZF variable ratio steering, and a central locking system.

Golden State indicates that the 10 new Van Hool C2045 coaches will be used throughout their service network and are intended to meet growth needs for 2001. The company is already anticipating a need to order 20 additional coaches in 2001 to meet its aggressive growth needs.

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