

Part One of the MCI history was published in a prior issue. This Part Two continues the story from approximately 1970 to the turn of the century.

The Fuel Crisis and Roswell

The early years of the 1970s saw several things that would impact MCI. Zoltok retired in 1971 after having been with the company for nearly four decades. In addition to founding the company, he brought it from a small, regional builder to its current status on the way to becoming the largest coachbuilder in the United States and Canada.

U.S. operators saw Greyhound's MCI coaches and wanted them too. By this time MCI was already challenging General Motors in the market. Unlike Greyhound, a company that handled its own support and used coach sales, other operator customers required some sales and customer support. Many of them also wanted to trade in older coaches. To provide this type of support to MCI customers, Hausman Bus Sales was appointed as MCI's exclusive U.S. distributor on May 1, 1972. Originally founded in 1946 to handle used parts and equipment from Greyhound, Gerald Hausman had developed the operation into a parts company and used coach business. Headquartered in Chicago, by 1968 the company had branch offices in New Jersey and California plus other smaller, locations.

As sales increased, the MCI parts operation moved from Pembina in 1971 to Northlake, Illinois. In 1975, the company name was changed to Universal Coach Parts. An interesting side note is that since many bus companies ordered their parts shipped by bus package express, Greyhound scheduled a daily run from Chicago to Northlake for this purpose. For a while this run was held down by a Scenicruiser combo that had only a few passenger seats at the front.

The 35-foot coach in the product line was upgraded to the model MC-5B in 1971. Initially there were few changes from the MC-5A but when the MC-8 model was introduced in 1973, the MC-5B was given square marker lights replacing the bullet lights of the previous models. The MC-5B model remained in production until 1977, but it was increasingly obvious that most operators were moving to the 40-foot coaches.

Production switched from the MC-7 to the MC-8 in 1973. Dimensions remained that same with a length of 40 feet, three axles and a width of 96 inches. However, the MC-8 had a more squared appearance and some new features. Instead of the larger dip in the roof of the MC-7 that somewhat imitated the Scenicruiser, the MC-8 had only a small dip in the roof. In 1978, during its last year of production, the slanted MC-8 windows were



MCI Celebrates 90 Years

Part Two

by Larry Plachno

Photos from MCI or NBT Archives unless otherwise indicated

The new MC-8 model was introduced in 1973, replacing the MC-7 in the model line. It offered some new features, had more of a squared appearance and only a smaller dip in the roof at the front. By the time the MC-8 model appeared, MCI was moving strongly ahead in market share and industry popularity.

replaced by the new square windows of the forthcoming MC-9 model.

In 1973 the most noteworthy event in the bus industry was the fuel crisis. A shortage of fuel caused many gas stations to run out or ration. This resulted in encouraging a small percentage of auto owners to take the bus that in turn increased new coach sales. Orders increased to such an extent that there

was no capacity left at Winnipeg for Greyhound bus orders. To resolve this problem and continue building coaches for Greyhound, a sister company known as Transportation Manufacturing Corporation (TMC) was established in an aircraft hangar in Roswell, New Mexico.

TMC went into production in late 1974 with the new model MC-8. While the



The first production MC-9 is shown on the assembly line at the Ft. Garry plant in Winnipeg. Based on the color, your editor thinks that this first unit went to John Mancebo of Allstate Charter Lines in Fresno, California.



The TMC facility in Roswell built the Orion small transit bus under license from Ontario Bus Industries for several years. They were sold through Hausman Bus Sales who also sold the regular MCI coach models.

coaches produced at Roswell were essentially the same as at Winnipeg and Pembina, they carried the "TMC" letters on their nose plate instead of "MCI." For the first eight years of production, Roswell did not have its own parts manufacturing line. Both parts and knocked-down shells were shipped to Roswell from the Fort Garry plant. The Fort Garry plant also continued to ship shells to Pembina for completion. The initial production at Roswell was for Greyhound but in later years many of the coaches produced went to other operators.

In late 1977, the model MC-5C replaced the MC-5B as the 35-foot coach in the model line. It was the most changed of the series since it effectively included an MC-8 type front and then the roof dipped down slightly behind the entranceway to a standard 35-foot coach body. It remained in production through 1980, but only 380 total units were produced. Many of these were a special order for Greyhound to be used for contract service in Saudi Arabia. Forty MC-5C coaches on this order were built to a transit configuration with two doors, a double roof to help dissipate heat and no restroom.

The new MC-9 model made its debut in Portland in October of 1978 with the first deliveries in late January of 1979. Like the previous MC-7 and MC-8 models, it was 40 feet long, 96 inches wide and had three axles although a few were built with only two axles. However, it now made a clean break with the Scenicruiser design by having a flat roof. The MC-9 achieved two distinctions. For a few years after the elimination of the 35-foot model, it was the only model produced by MCI. It also amassed a total production count of more than 9,500 units, making it the most popular 40-foot coach in the U.S. and Canada.

The most important event in 1979 was the arrival of the second fuel crisis that was regarded by many as worse than the first one in 1973. Once again gas stations ran out

of fuel and some automobile drivers began riding buses. Sales of new buses increased while the values on used coaches went up. Some operators actually sold their "slots" on the production line to other operators more in need of equipment.

Production was expanded to new levels. A second production line was added at Fort Garry and Pembina. Winnipeg and Pembina were turning out five coaches per working day. In addition, they were supplying another two coaches per day on a "knocked down" basis for TMC at Roswell. Unfortunately, the fuel crisis was diminishing just as production increased. The 35-foot MC-5C model was discontinued in June of 1980 so that production could concentrate on the more popular 40-foot coach.

Other than the sole trolley bus MCI built for Winnipeg in 1942, MCI had never shown much interest in transit buses. This changed in 1979 when the Citycruiser went into production in Roswell. Orion in Mississauga, Ontario, was founded in 1975 by Don Sheardown as Ontario Bus Industries. His goal was to build a good, integral small transit bus to replace the aging smaller GM transits that were then still in operation. A licensing arrangement with TMC in Roswell put the Citycruiser into production that was sold through Hausman Bus Sales. In later years, Ontario Bus Industries moved into the big time with larger transit buses and was eventually acquired by Daimler.

Several changes in the early 1980s showed that MCI was taking over as the

Increasing orders prompted the establishment of an additional manufacturing facility adjacent to the airport in Roswell, New Mexico. It went into production in 1974 with the MC-8 model for Greyhound but later built coaches for other operators. Originally, shells and parts were shipped to Roswell from the Ft. Garry plant in Winnipeg, but Roswell later developed its own parts supply.





Starting the new "alphabet" models, the new 96A3 was introduced in December of 1984 at Salt Lake City at the same show where the Setra, Van Hool and LAG were introduced. This photo was taken when the NBT staff got the new coach out into Salt Lake City for a photo shoot.



The MC-5C was discontinued in June of 1980, ending 35-foot production. Shown here on the production line at Ft. Garry was one of several MC-5C coaches built with a center passenger door and a double roof for a Greyhound contract at oil production locations in Saudi Arabia.

leading motorcoach in the United States and Canada. Additional parts locations were opened in 1980 including Ontario and New Jersey. An additional facility opened in California in 1984. In 1982 the Roswell facility established its own parts manufacturing line and no longer depended on major shipments from Winnipeg. December of 1984 saw the introduction of MCI's first "Letter Model" at an event in Salt Lake City with the new 96A3. The new model designation highlighted width and number of axles and would remain in use until the turn of the century. The "A" model was soon available in widths of 96 and 102 inches and with two or three axles.

From Operations to Manufacturing

For a period of about seven years from late 1986 to 1993, Greyhound Corp. made the decision to exit bus operations but increase involvement in bus manufacturing, thus bringing MCI into a third and substantially larger era of transit bus production.

It all started in December of 1986 when Greyhound Corp. announced that it was selling Greyhound Lines to a group of investors headed by Fred Currey in Dallas. By this time Greyhound had made major investments in soap and meatpacking. This was soon followed by Greyhound's acquisition of the remaining bus production of General Motors. GM had previously discontinued coach production in 1979 since that part of the market had gone to MCI. Two transit production lines remained. One was the popular modular RTS (Rapid Transit Series) produced at GM's traditional Pontiac, Michigan facility. The other was the GM production facility at St. Eustache, Quebec, not far from Montreal.

The RTS was a modular design in five-foot segments originally produced by GM in 1977 as a temporary model until the new Transbus went into production. As bus his-

torians know, the Transbus was a failure and the RTS not only continued in production and then became the most popular transit bus on the market. The RTS production line was moved to the Roswell, New Mexico facility in 1987.

GM originally built transit buses in London, Ontario but moved to St. Eustache, Quebec in 1979 following a major order for New Look transit buses by Montreal. The models were changed from the New Look to the Classic model in 1982-83 and 16 articulated Classic transit buses were also built. The transit buses carried the MCI name making MCI both the largest coach and largest transit bus builder at this time. The only pre-

vious company that could claim this was General Motors.

MCI upgraded its coach product line in 1988 with the introduction of the new model 102C3. As you can tell by the model number, it had a width of 102 inches, three axles and a length of 40 feet. Designed primarily for upscale charter and tour service, the 102C3 offered a fully paintable exterior, although some operators continued to insist on some optional stainless steel siding. It soon became more popular than originally anticipated. The 'B' model was not introduced until 1991 and was offered as the 96B3 and 102B3. These replaced the 96A3 and 102A3. The 96B3 was the last 96-inch wide coach offered

The popular RTS transit bus production line was purchased and then moved to the Roswell facility in 1987. This TMC RTS was built in 1991 and carried fleet number 8234 for the New York City Transit Authority. It was photographed on November 27, 1992 on 34th Street near Macy's Department Store. J.C. REBIS JR.





When the 45-foot length was approved, MCI introduced their new 45-foot 102DL3 model at the UBOA Bus Expo in Chicago in February of 1992. It offered the newer Series 60 engine in a larger engine compartment and went on to become MCI's most popular model for several years.



After suffering through a bankruptcy, Greyhound began to update their fleet with the MC-12 model. It was somewhat of an anachronism because of its 96-inch width and 40-foot length, but it was compatible with the existing fleet. Greyhound owned 801 of them by the end of 1994.

by MCI since the narrow width was losing popularity.

Greyhound Corp. began changing its name to avoid a connection with the bus operating company and eliminate calls asking when the next bus would leave. By 1991, it had become Dial Corp., named after the soap company it owned. However, it continued to expand in bus manufacturing. In 1989 Universal Coach Parts moved its primary operation and warehouse from Northlake to a larger facility in Des Plaines, Illinois. In 1993, Universal Coach Parts introduced its own brand of parts called Coach Guard. Further expansion came in 1995 with the acquisition of

school bus parts distribution and in 1997 with the acquisition of parts business from the Flexible Company.

More expansion in the manufacturing end included the acquisition of Hausman Bus Sales in 1989. In 1983, Hausman had moved to a new location on Golf Road in Des Plaines, Illinois that included sales, service and parts. After the MCI acquisition, the Hausman parts business was transferred to Universal Coach Parts. The facility then housed some MCI corporate offices for a while. It was noteworthy that even after the sale, Gerald Hausman would show up for work most every day. Other acquisitions at that time included Custom Coach Corporation of Columbus, Ohio,

a major converter of coaches into motor homes, entertainer coaches and corporate interiors. Custom Coach had recently provided a coach to Greyhound that was used to transport announcer John Madden to his football games.

MCI began experimenting with the 45-foot coach length in anticipation of future developments. In late 1989 the company produced a 45-foot conversion shell based on the 102C3 model. Funded in part by the Canadian government, MCI developed a 45-foot prototype accessible coach in 1990. It included several features for the handicapped including a wheelchair lift and accessible restroom.

Coach production ended at the Roswell, New Mexico facility in 1990. In addition to coaches, this facility also produced truck trailers and the Citycruiser transit bus developed by Orion. It had been building the RTS transit buses since 1987.

Two things happened at this time that required changes in the MCI product line. One took place on December 18, 1991 when the new Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act was signed into law. It included a provision that established 45 feet as the allowable length for coaches on interstate and federal aid highways. The second change was that Detroit Diesel introduced their new Series 60 engine as the replacement for then-popular 8V-92TA. Since the new engine was larger than the current model, it could not fit into the engine compartments of the existing A, B or C models.

As a result, MCI officially introduced its new 45-foot 102DL3 model at the UBOA Bus Expo in Chicago in February of 1992. It came with a larger engine compartment including the Series 60 engine and several innovations. Production started in late 1992. The companion 40-foot 102D3 model was introduced in January of 1994.

With the 45-foot coach length on the horizon, MCI worked with the Canadian government in 1990 to produce a prototype coach for the disabled in a length of 45 feet. It had several features for the handicapped including a lift for mobility devices and an accessible restroom. While this coach never went into production, it did serve as a prototype for the 102DL3 model that was introduced after the 45-foot length was approved.





In 1994 MCI merged with Grupo Dina of Mexico and began selling the 43-foot Mexican-built Dina Viaggio model in the United States. This photo of a Dina Viaggio was taken at the Dina plant in Sahagun, Mexico.



MCI developed the new "G" model with Greyhound input though some were sold to other carriers. Originally built as the G4100 in Mexico, Greyhound later took delivery of these 45-foot G4500 models built at Winnipeg.

Following a bankruptcy, Greyhound again began looking for new coaches for its fleet. Instead of moving to the new width and length, Greyhound elected to stay with a 40-foot length and a 96-inch width. What MCI offered was the MC-12 model, effectively a cross between the MC-9 and the 96A3. By the end of 1994, Greyhound had 801 of them in its fleet.

The End of the Greyhound Era

The 48-year relationship with Greyhound ended in 1993 that had seen MCI catapulted from being a small, regional Canadian builder to the leading coach manufacturer in the United States and Canada. MCI and the other companies involved in the Transportation Manufacturing Operations segment of Dial Corp. (formerly Greyhound Corp.) were spun off as an autonomous operation known as Motor Coach Industries International (MCII). Included was all of Pembina, 69 percent of the Winnipeg oper-

ations, TMC, Hausman Bus Sales, Universal Coach Parts, BusLease, Custom Coach Crop., MCI Acceptance Corp. and a small interest in Mexicana de Autobuses. Not included was the former GMC Diesel Division in St. Eustache, Quebec and the RTS line that had recently been sold to Novabus. While this offered independence of a sort, it also saddled the new company with substantial debt that would become an ongoing concern for years.

Later in 1993, the now-independent MCII did manage to acquire the outstanding 31 percent of stock in the Winnipeg facility that had been publically traded on the Toronto Stock Exchange. Not included with MCII were the two transit bus production operations. A new company named Novabus was created to save the jobs at St. Eustache. It acquired this facility in 1994, continued Classic bus production, and developed their new LFS bus that was first delivered in 1997. It continues in operation. Novabus originally

took over the RTS line in Roswell but sold it to Millenium Transit Services in 2003. Operations closed in 2009 when the industry went to low-floor models.

MCII's independence did not last long. In 1994, a merger was orchestrated with Grupo Dina of Mexico in a complex deal involving a Dina subsidiary in the United States and an exchange of MCII stock for Dina stock and notes. Dina was originally founded in 1951 as Diesel National S.A. by the Mexican government. In 1961 the company had an agreement with Flxible to build the Hi-Level and Flxliner models in Mexico. In 1989 the company was privatized when acquired by Consorcio Grupo G S A de CV owned by the Flores family. More recently, Dina had expressed a strong interest in entering the U.S. market by displaying two coaches at the UMA show in 1993 with pretty señoritas passing out literature. Dina showed three coaches at the UMA show in early 1994, including a 45-

Even after the regular MC-12 model production ceased, some units were built in 1994 as Prisoner Transportation Vehicles using the smaller Series 50 engine. This photo shows the last one leaving Winnipeg for finishing in Pembina, representing the last of the "number" models dating back to 1948. MARC SAUCIER.



Flxible had built coaches at their home base in Loudonville, Ohio for decades including Clippers and later models. When Flxible ceased production, MCI acquired the facility and used it to build both new and aftermarket coach parts. It also developed a reputation for collision repair, major refurbishing and drive train updates.





The introduction of the Renaissance or 102EL3 model in 1998 was a major turning point for MCI. This sleek new design was immediately popular with the upscale charter and tour market. Down the road, this design would be applied to the new J4500 model that became the most popular coach on the market and continues as the flagship of the MCI fleet today.

foot Paradiso model, and provided sales literature in English.

Almost immediately, MCI began selling the 43-foot Mexican-built Dina Viaggio bus in the United States. MCI engineers then developed a new integral coach model that went into production at the Dina factory in Sahagun, Mexico. A 40-foot version was sold to Mexican operators while the 35-foot two-axle model, initially known as the 102F2 and later as the F3500, was sold in the United States.

Following that, MCI developed the new "G" model in conjunction with Greyhound. It was designed primarily for scheduled service and included several Greyhound recommendations to simplify maintenance. It was originally put into production at the Sahagun plant in a 41-foot version that became known as the G4100. It would later continue in production with the more-standard 45-foot length. Hence, for a period of a few years, MCI was building buses in three countries.

Meanwhile, MCI had acquired the former Flxible facility in Loudonville, Ohio, in 1996 after Flxible ceased production. Both new coach parts and aftermarket bus parts were built there. The facility soon developed an excellent reputation for collision repair, major refurbishing and drive train updates.

If you were watching closely, you might have noted models D, F and G but no E. The MCI engineers were working on the new model "E" in Winnipeg. With the "D" model and its predecessors holding an excellent

reputation as a durable scheduled service coach, MCI set about developing a new model geared to the upscale charter and tour market. It included new web frame construction for more design potential as well as some improved systems. It was introduced in 1998 as the Renaissance or 102E3 model and achieved some substantial success because of its attractive appearance.

An interesting side note is that 1998 marked a high point in coach sales. Major factors included a good economy and an increase in new coach sales as operators moved from the 40- to the 45-foot length. It is interesting that a previous high point in coach sales was noted 50 years earlier when Greyhound was taking delivery of 2,000 Silversides coaches in 1948 to renew its post-war fleet.

The connection between Dina and MCI became strained because of economic problems in Mexico and financial concerns with Dina. The Mexican economy started having problems. Mexican bus sales dropped and the Mexican Peso was devalued. A failed Dina contract with Western Star Trucks may also have been a major factor. MCI soon began overshadowing Dina and accounted for more than 90 percent of Dina's operating profit. Dina began taking on debt and eventually owed \$700 million. The profit from MCI was used to service some of this debt. With Dina stock and notes essentially worthless, MCI was again saddled with debt as money went to another company.

Part Three of the MCI history will appear in a future issue. It will start around the turn of the

century and bring the MCI story up to the current date. □



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9698 W. Judson Road
Polo, Illinois 61064
Ph: (815) 946-2341
Fx: (815) 946-2347
www.busmag.com