



Marv and Hazel Roberts-Owners of this Casper, Wyoming, firm have gone from converting buses for their own use to creating conversions for interested parties from across the country.

By Carol F. Maxwell & E.S. Gurdjian, F76350

Have you ever met someone for the first time and felt as though you've known them for years? That's how it was when we met Marv and Hazel Roberts, the owners of Sundance Coach Company, a conversion firm based in Casper, Wyoming. The Robertses have a confident demeanor yet a relaxed, friendly attitude, and their competence and sense of quality become evident when one views their creations. It is understandable that the Roberts' customers many times become their good friends.

The Robertses now have five employees and a facility that will accommodate five to six buses inside and includes a full workshop. They increased the size of the building by 50 percent in 1994.

When asked how all of this started, Marv responded, "Years

ago I was working as a plant manager for Jet-X in Denver, Colorado. The owners decided they wanted to do something different, so they bought a ranch near Laramie, Wyoming, and asked me to be the ranch manager. Part of my job description was to drive an old Eagle bus to pick up clients in Denver and to bring them to the ranch. Since I like everything to work, I soon began maintaining and repairing that old bus myself."

Marv Continued. "One day Hazel and I were driving down a highway and saw an old 4104 sitting at the roadside with a "for sale" sign. We had to have it! We repaired, rebuilt, and converted it. We enjoyed using it and then, at a rally, another guy like it more than I did, so I sold it. We bought another bus and converted it. Then another guy liked that one more than I, so I sold it, too. I got the

idea that I should do this as a business."

Ten years ago Sundance Coach Company was Marv and Hazel Roberts, and they did everything themselves. Marv describes himself as a "shirttail engineer." He likes to fix things. We agree with him that most engineering, unless you are doing analytical work, consists primarily of good common sense.

These days, Sundance employs a cabinet maker, a diesel mechanic, and a certified welder. All of the company's employees have multiple skills, and two hold commercial drivers licenses. The conversion exteriors reflect Marv's skills in the areas of auto body repair and painting. As when Marv and Hazel started, the only subcontracted jobs are the upholstery work and carpet installation.

While Sundance Coach will convert any type of bus, the Robertses are always alert to finding 35 foot models, as they seek to satisfy customers who want a bus conversion but still want a more manageable length. However, Marv noted that these buses are becoming more difficult to find.

When we visited the Sundance facility we saw completed Eagle, MCI, and Crown buses, along with another MCI that was undergoing conversion; It was obvious that Sundance was comfortable working

After the work on the shell has been completed, the actual conversion begins. The bays are thoughtfully outfitted with all the usual devices found in bus conversions. Sundance incorporates only the best components and arranges the equipment to facilitate use and service.

All the interior's solid-wood custom cabinetry adheres to a high standard. It exhibits sturdy construction, good fit, and elegant lines. Marv told us that he likes to use ash for the cabinetry. It looks

with special roll-out shelves supplied additional space for their inventory. The living area includes the necessary file cabinet, which has the appearance of fine furniture, and two sofas so that this area can be used as a comfortable showroom. This coach was well-planned and appeared to be the perfect combination for home and work.

Now for the bottom line. A completely refurbished shell that looks brand-new will cost approximately \$125,000.

The 1980 Eagle pictured on the previous page was converted by Sundance Coach Corporation for a Budweiser distributor who hails from Vail, Colorado. Sundance remanufactures shells if needed, as was the case with the 1960 Eagle 01 shown below, left. It was widened to 102 inches; the roof was raised 6 inches; and updated Model 15 caps were added. Also below, right, is an example of the company's interior handiwork, shown in this 1983 MCI-9



with coaches of different configurations.

The most important requirement in selecting a pre-owned bus for conversion is that there be no chassis rust. The first step in the conversion process is to remove the seats, strip the interior, and begin reconstruction of the shell. Nearly all of the buses receive new skins and updated front and rear caps. Currently, older Eagles are being widened to 102 inches, and raised roofs and updates to a Model 15 are being made at considerable savings. The engine, transmission, and all other chassis systems are inspected and repaired by Sundance. It is not unusual for the company to upgrade or replace the power train to accommodate customer requests.

similar to oak, and he claims it is less susceptible to cracking. The coaches we saw were exquisitely detailed with ceramic tile, Corian countertops, plush carpeting and the finest components available.

None of us have the same lifestyle, and we all have different needs. One of the reasons for the success of Sundance may be that Marv and Hazel Roberts have always been diligent in their efforts to provide for the needs and wants of the customer. As an example, the MCI in progress was being built for a couple who want to not only live in the coach but also to work in it. They are sales representatives who need to carry a large volume of samples. Raising the bed a bit provided an unbelievable amount of organized storage, and a cabinet

Depending on optional equipment, the finished conversion may range up to \$250,000. Considering that high-quality workmanship pervades every part of these coaches, not only on the surface, we thought this to be a reasonable and competitive price range.

For more information, contact Sundance Coach Company, Inc. PO Box 10006, Casper, WY 82602; (307) 577-7039.