

ABC Coach Presents

The Van Hool

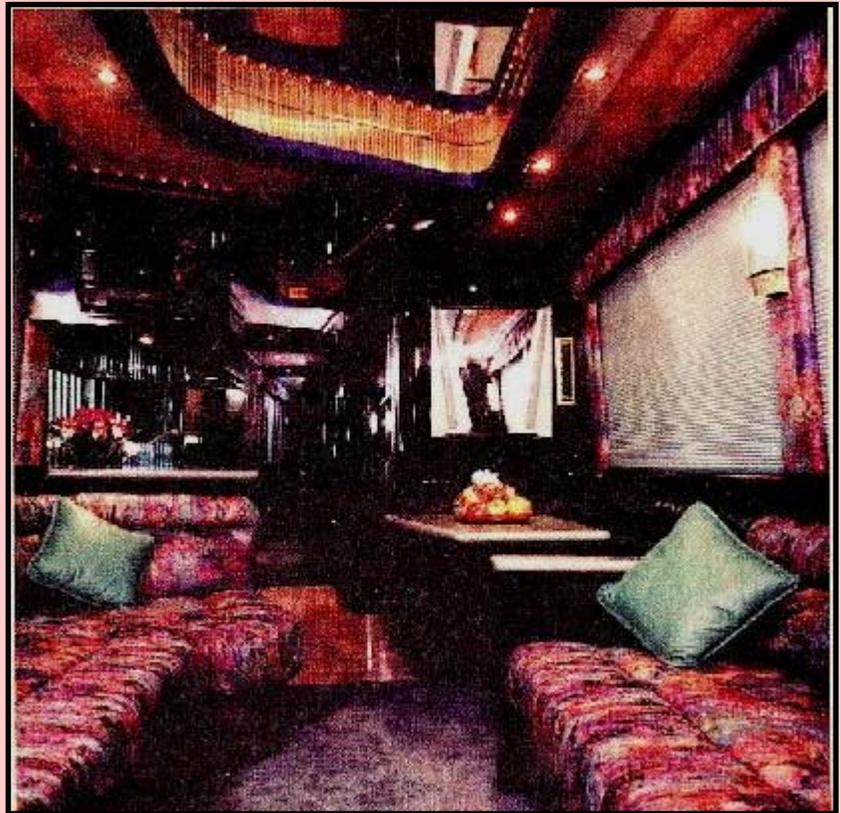
Conversion Shell

This Winter Garden, Florida, company is the exclusive importer and distributor of a coach shell produced by a family-owned manufacturing facility in Belgium.

By Carol Maxwell & E. S. Gurdjian, F76350

After viewing the Van Hool conversion shell that ABC Coach, Inc., C6210, displayed at an FMCA convention, we traveled to the company's facility in Winter Garden, Florida, to learn more about the unit and about ABC Coach. ABC is the exclusive importer and distributor of the Van Hool coach shell which is produced in Belgium.

Clarence Cornell, chairman and chief executive officer of ABC Coach, started out in the bus business as an operator, purchasing Faribault Bus Service of Faribault, Minnesota, in 1958. In 1972 he expanded the bus operating business to include purchasing and selling equipment. Thus began ABC Bus, Inc. Under Cornell's direction, the company grew to provide sales, service, leasing, and importing and exporting. Two sons and several other qualified personnel have joined Cornell. ABC Bus Companies, Inc. is the parent corporation of four other firms. These include ABC Bus, Inc., preowned coach sales and service; ABC Coach Inc., new Van Hool sales and after sales support; ABC Bus Leasing, Inc.,





new and preowned coach leasing and finance; and International Coach Parts, Inc., the company's parts distribution arm.

ABC sells and leases buses to tour companies, so they always have a large supply of used buses. Anyone looking for an older bus for conversion may want to inspect the company's inventory. In five locations across the country, ABC offers full-service bus maintenance and repair. This includes complete body shops plus parts and service for all diesel engines. Addresses and telephone numbers of each of the locations are listed near the end of this article.

Rod Synovec, vice president of ABC Coach, Inc. led us on a tour of the extensive plant in Winter Garden. We visited the body shop, the mechanical repair shop, the parts department, the administrative offices, and acres of used buses. All personnel and employees we met presented a professional demeanor and seemed committed to customer service and satisfaction. Dane Cornell, president of ABC Coach, Inc., reinforced what

we had already suspected. Even though the business has expanded widely, the employees of the family-owned -and-operated company have a personal interest in satisfying the needs of every customer-individual and commercial alike.

Van Hool is a family-owned manufacturing company in Belgium and has a special department of engineers who are responsible for verifying and maintaining compliance with all the requirements of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and all Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard.

The Van Hool coach has been used extensively in Europe, and ABC has found it to be a popular tour coach in the company's sales and leasing program. In July 1995, ABC Coach delivered its one-thousandth Van Hool coach to Seniors Unlimited, a tour and charter company based in Pontiac, Michigan. Van Hool conversion shells have become popular in the entertainment industry as well. The conversions pictured with this article were created by Marathon Coach. The

shells are available in 35-foot, 40-foot, and 45-foot models and are priced from \$200,000 to \$250,000.

Gene "J.R." Hearld is one of the Van Hool technical service representatives for ABC Coach, Inc. Mr. Hearld is clearly a knowledgeable technician and patiently showed us a Van Hool coach from top to bottom, pointing out several noteworthy features.

For instance, the coach is equipped with wheel flares that are secured with three bolts that can be removed to provide access to tires and air bags. All bay doors have pneumatic struts. The drive axle has leaf springs in addition to air bellows. Each of five dry air tanks has its own separate gauge. The Webasto heater has been replumbed to provide central heat. If the heat valve should fail, it will fail in the wide-open position, and then heat can be regulated by using manually operated gate valves located on the back wall of the first bay.

Specifications For 45-foot Coach

Dimensions:

- Overall length - 45 feet
- Overall width - 102 inches
- Overall height - 11 feet 6 inches
- Wheelbase - 23 feet 3 inches
- Overhang front - 6 feet 11 inches
- Overhang rear - 10 feet 7 inches
- Headroom - 86 inches
- Turning radius at body corner - 41 feet 2 inches
- Turning radius at outside of tire - 37 feet
- Fuel tank capacity - 113 U.S. gallons (mounted behind front axle; water separator; filling necks on both sides)
- Underfloor luggage capacity - 402 cubic feet
- Gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) - 47,400 pounds
- Front gross axle weight rating (GAWR) 14,325 pounds
- Tandem axle rating - 33075 pounds

Mechanical Data:

- Cummins M11 - 400E Celect - four-stroke-cycle diesel engine, water-cooled, turbocharged, with air-to-air aftercooler

- Automatic 6-speed Allison World Transmission B500R with integrated retarder
- Integral air suspension
- Bendix braking system
- ZF 8066 power steering
- 8.25 X 22.5 steel disc wheels
- Goodyear 315/80R22.5 TL G391 Radial Unisteel tubeless tires

Electrical:

- 24-volt system
- 2 8D batteries on pull-out roller-type tray
- Vanner Battery equalizer
- 2 Bosch 120-amp alternators
- manual circuit breakers

Body:

- Monocoque construction
- Aluminum roof
- Galvanized steel side panels
- Front and rear panels, fiberglass-reinforced polyester
- Aluminum luggage doors
- Manual-operated entrance door
- Glazed windows

Optional Equipment:

- Road relay for Cummins Celect engine
- High-idle speed for AC system
- ABS
- Polished aluminum wheels
- Central locking bay doors
- Electric visors, for front windshield
- Additional fuel tap for auxiliary power unit
- Kneeling device
- Lifting device
- Air-operated outswinging front door (1 panel) with emergency release valves, one at the inside and one at the outside. A key lock is located at the outside valve.
- Blinded side windows according to customer's specifications
- Additional color
- Metallic color
- Wheel embellishers
- Timer for Webasto preheater
- Air conditioning SUETRAK AC 35/US, cooling-reheat, roof-mounted with Carrier 05-G compressor
- Driver's seat ISRI 6500-515 US with air suspension-uncovered.

Because minimal space exists between the air-to-air aftercooler and radiator, this area can become clogged with dirt. Van Hool engineers have devised an attached cleaning tool to solve this problem. The cleaner is an L-shaped tube with ports along its vertical leg. It can be connected to either air or water and slides back and forth between the aftercooler and the radiator to remove accumulated debris.

The coach electrical system uses color-coded wires with space for extra relays and spare wires to the front, rear, dash, and luggage bays. The bumper of the coach drops down to reveal a spare tire that slides out on rollers; the release for the bumper is located in the cab. Many more features are listed in the specification section.

The next part of our visit involved a short excursion in an unloaded Van Hool charter bus. The weather was clear and dry, and we drove partly in local traffic and partly on a limited access highway. The ride was smooth

and comfortable. Ed did the driving, and he had no trouble adapting to the coach and found that it handled well in city traffic and on the highway. Visibility was excellent, and power and braking were adequate. This coach was equipped with a Telma retarder, but newer coaches have the Allison World Transmission and transmission retarder as standard equipment.

Deliveries of 1997 coaches will begin in November 1996, and several new product features will be added at that time. Buyers will have the choice of a 450-horsepower Cummins M11 Plus engine or a 500-horsepower Detroit Diesel Series 60 engine. The front and tag axles will be equipped with Independent suspension systems, and the coaches will have disc brakes.

Since our visit, ABC Coach has added three Van Hool service technicians, as well as a manager for the company's after-sales service department. For more information about the Van Hool conversion shell

or other services mentioned, contact ABC Bus at the following locations:

ABC Bus California
13261 Garden Grove Blvd.
Garden Grove, CA 92641
(800) 322-2877

ABC Bus Florida
17469 W. Highway 50
Winter Garden, FL 34787
(800) 222-2871

ABC Bus Minnesota
1506 30th St. NW
Faribault, MN 55021
(800) 222-2875

ABC Bus Texas
9401 N. Freeway
Fort Worth, TX 76131
(800) 222-2877

ABC Bus New Jersey
1494 Federal St.
Camden, NJ 08105
(800) 222-2873