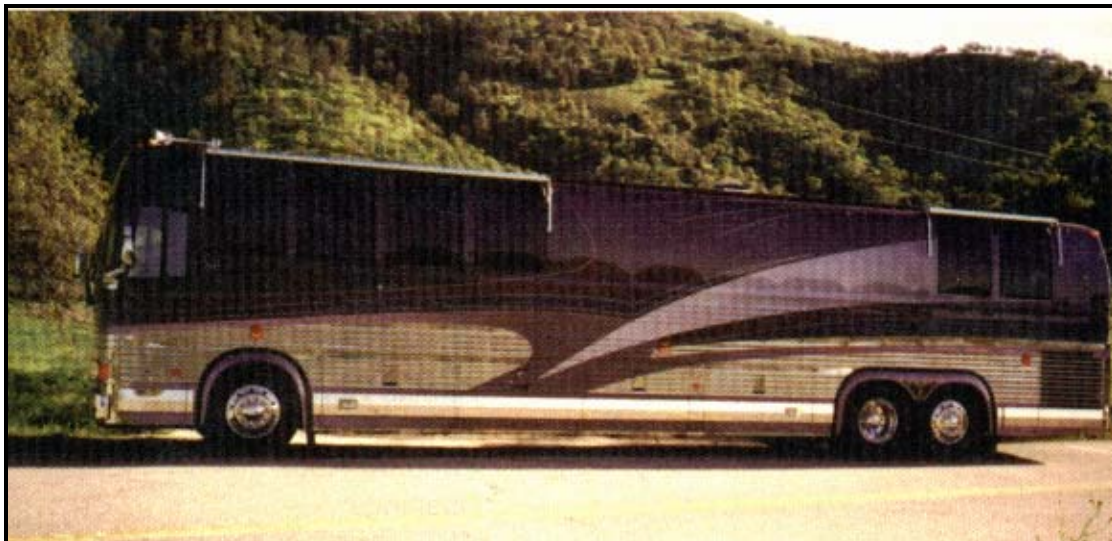


American Carriage Produces “Legends for the Road”



American Carriage's ability to accommodate different needs and tastes is evidenced by varying paint schemes (above and below)



**By CAROL MAXWELL &
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Mark and Jocelyn Fechner, owners of American Carriage Inc., C7791, believe that their integrity and reputation are their most important assets. Their honesty and commitment to always offer the best possible materials and workmanship serve as the basis for their company's policies. This couple's approach includes a marvelously positive attitude and a desire to turn dreams into reality for their cli-

ents, which has led them to their motto: "Creating New Legends for the Road."

Jocelyn describes her husband as an excellent design engineer with an uncanny ability to problem-solve. Mark would be hard-pressed to remember a time when he wasn't interested in building something. In high school, he had the good fortune of being exposed to a drafting teacher who was also a general contractor. This teacher became Mark's mentor. After high school, Mark worked for him and

learned about construction design and engineering. Mark obtained his contractor's license at the age of 19, and for the next 10 years he built custom homes in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains. He was always driven to be uniquely creative, and none of his homes are exactly alike.

When the California economy faltered several years ago, fewer people could afford to contract for a custom-built home. With only standard construction work, Mark's creativity was



This California-based coach converter takes an innovative approach to building custom conversions

restricted, and he found himself becoming bored.

Around the same time, the Fechners discovered an interest in bus conversions. In 1990 they bought an 05 Eagle shell and began converting it for themselves in their spare time. When it was only half finished, someone purchased it and then contracted the Fechners to complete the conversion. This coach served as transportation and as a dressing room for fashion models while they were being photographed on location. The same customer contracted for a second coach for personal use.

As has been the case with many bus conversion companies, the Fechners' business began with the couple converting pre-owned buses at their home. As word spread about their ability and reliability, the business began to blossom. In 1995 they were in the right place when another converter was not able to fulfill a contract to convert a new Eagle for football star Reggie White. The Fechners designed and implemented their first slide-out on this new coach. After the modification was completed, it was thoroughly tested to assure that the frame maintained its original strength and flexibil-

ity.

When the Fechners were looking for a place to relocate, they sought good schools and a safe environment in which to raise their three young children. They ultimately decided on Tehachapi, California, a town in the Sierra Nevada mountain range approximately 100 miles north of Los Angeles. The area met all their requirements, plus it offered a bonus: considerable, motorhome traffic on State Route 58 at the edge of town.

After the move to Tehachapi in 1996, the couple made a decision to redirect their efforts to convert new bus shells exclusively, and in 1997 they completed their first new Prevost conversion. Each bus conversion can be completed in six months, and in their current facility, they can work on two at any one time. Because of constant growth, the Fechners are investigating a move to a larger plant.

A conversion begins with Mark's painstaking design development. Jocelyn manages the office and handles all correspondence and promotional development, yet she also assists Mark with the design package, especially in coordinating colors and materials.

All of Mark's design concepts are eventually carried out in a meticulously neat and highly organized shop. In addition to Mark and Jocelyn, American Carriage has five experienced and highly skilled employees, including an electrician, an upholsterer, and a cabinetmaker. Two other employees specialize in plumbing and bay components. Both Fechners are involved in every step of the conversion and conduct regular inspections. However, they still insist that employees fix what needs to be fixed, regardless of whether or not it will ever be seen by anyone else, and empower them to do so. This is the foundation for excellent work.

The coach we saw displayed fine craftsmanship. Exquisite detail of fit and finish was apparent throughout. The scope of the design engineering even encompassed the coach's appearance when reflected in mirrors. The company uses computer-assisted design for the coach's exterior paint scheme, electrical layout, and floor plan. The computer program helps the converters to glean maximum use from valuable inches and aids in developing special features.

Mark has created many innovations, including a pneumatic rear camera door that automatically opens whenever the rear monitor is activated, and a fully automatic air step, which is operative when the ignition is off or the transmission is in neutral (it is disabled when the transmission is in gear). Other inventions include a pneumatic front bumper latch; air-operated pocket doors that decelerate as they near the open or closed position; and silent, radiant floor heat throughout the coach via the Aqua-Hot system.

To maintain the Prevost shells' sleek, smooth appearance, American Carriage does not put any holes, doors, or vents in their sides. Every conversion features through-the-roof exhaust for the generator and Aqua-Hot system using stainless steel. Only maple or mahogany plywood is used in construction — not particleboard. All electrical wire is stranded with crimp fittings and runs through ENT blue plastic conduit. No Romex is used.

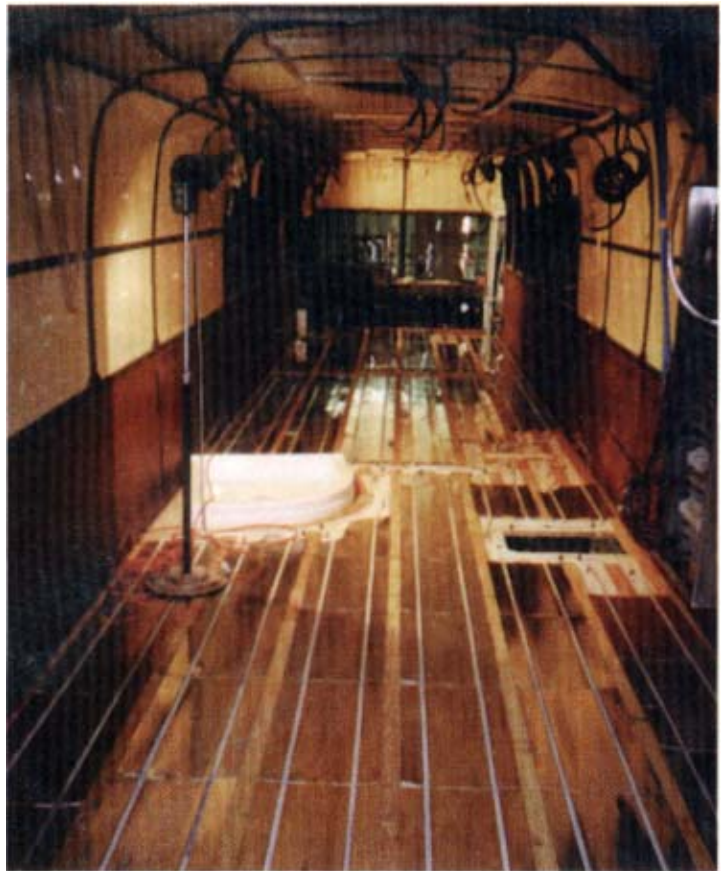
American Carriage coaches have more than 200 lighted switches that control more than 100 low-voltage relays. The coaches boast three junction boxes and up to 90 circuit breakers, because all AC and DC devices have separate breakers. Both the inside and outside surfaces of cabinets and drawers are finished. The Fechners have a policy of using only the finest parts. They note that quality is the first consideration rather than cost, even if the job contract is already signed.

An American Carriage motor coach contains all one would expect to see in a luxurious, state-of-the-art conversion, plus many features that may not be considered standard by others. This includes polished stainless-steel siding, double clear-coat paint, a full leather cockpit, a 20-cubic-foot residential refrigerator, dual 4,000-watt Trace inverters, the Aqua-Hot system, a 52,000-Btu central air-conditioning system with digital climate-control thermostats, and polypropylene water storage tanks.

American Carriage supplies a complete owners manual for coach operation. This includes a very impressive, comprehensive electrical diagram wherein every wire is numbered and recorded; a 24-hour toll-free phone number for service information; and an alphabetical list of warranty information for all equipment used in the coach.

American Carriage offers a multitude of optional equipment, both common and uncommon. The company's exclusive "System IQ" (computerized dash and complete coach controls) is one such possibility. Another is a recessed mirrored ceiling with accent colors and fiber-optic accent lighting. Buyers choose from a seemingly endless list of floor and cabinetry materials.

Mark currently is working on re-designing a slide-out for the Prevost



An unfinished shell reveals American Carriage's innovative radiant floor heating system.

shell that allows for uninterrupted bay storage space. The feature is planned to be introduced this year.

An example of how American Carriage is willing to meet special needs and desires of a client is demonstrated in a coach the company recently completed for professional basketball player Michael Cage of the New Jersey Nets. The computer design allowed the utilization of every available inch, which resulted in higher doorways so that Mr. Cage, who is 6 feet 9 inches tall, never has to stoop inside the coach. Even the shower was set into the floor to provide sufficient headroom. The seats and dash were

customized, and the accelerator and brake pedals were changed to accommodate Mr. Cage's wider foot. This is truly going the extra mile for customer satisfaction!

The Fechners of American Carriage Inc. offer an intensively personal approach to conversions. They believe that each coach will surpass the client's expectations.

For more information, contact: American Carriage Inc., 161 N. Mill St. #A, Tehachapi, CA 93561; (800) 631-0951, (805) 822-1767, fax: (805) 822-1796.