

Meet the Hoffmans of Hoffman Coach

Don and Margaret Hoffman are longtime members of the Family Motor Coach Association and also operate a custom coach conversion company that truly is a “family affair.”

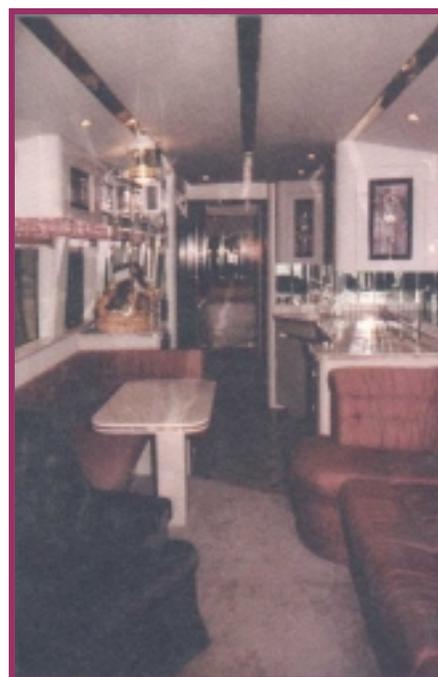


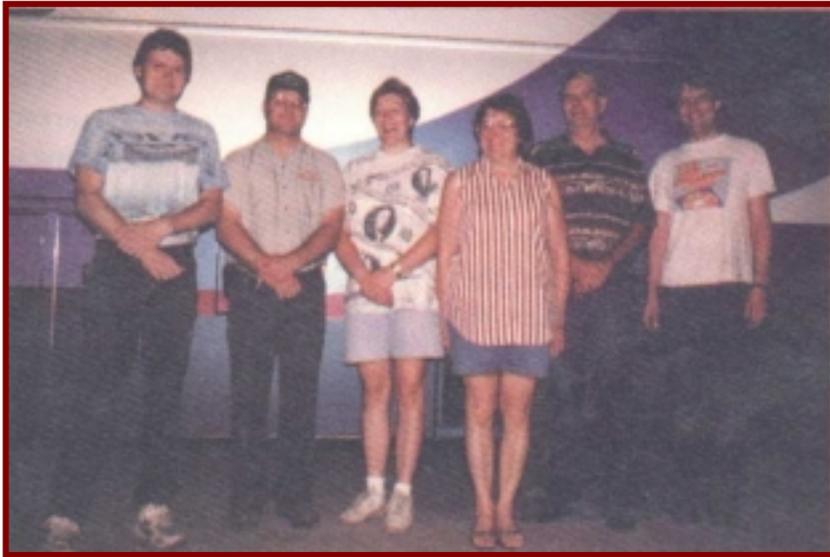
Stained glass is a hallmark of the custom creations from Hoffman Coach (above and below)

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

Don and Margaret Hoffman joined the Family Motor Coach Association in 1966. When they joined the then-fledgling organization, they were assigned membership number F2494. They later signed on as life members of the association, at which time the “F” appearing in front of their membership number was changed to an “L.” Don and Margaret are charter members of the Converted Coach, Allegheny Mountain, MCIers, Prevost Prouds, and Penn Coachmen chapters. In fact, they

helped to start them all. Margaret served as FMCA’s national secretary from 1972 to 1975, and from 1978 to 1980 she was a national vice president. She has served as a Governing Board member from 1972 to the present, Don currently serves on the Technical Advisory Committee for *Family Motor Coaching* magazine. Don and Margaret are also involved as commercial members of FMCA. They own and operate Hoffman Coach Company, C1859, which is one of the oldest continuously operating bus conversion companies in the United States.





Meet the Hoffman crew, from left: son, Jeff, son-in-law Doug, daughter Debbie, Margaret, Don, and son Tim

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Don's first bus purchase came in 1964. At that time he owned and operated an automatic transmission business, and also sold used cars. He bought a used rear-engine Superior school bus with plans to turn it into a workshop. Margaret, however, decided that they should use the bus to create a "house car." At that time they had never actually seen a bus that had been converted into a motorhome. Don did, however, have a friend who worked at Bolles-Aero Travel Trailers in nearby Warren, Pennsylvania. A visit to that trailer manufacturing plant gave Don and Margaret a number of ideas, and they were on their way to building a motorhome. After the coach was completed, they used it for a year to travel throughout the United States with their children.

A better bus came along in 1965, a rear-engine Oneida. It was powered by a Pontiac engine,

which Don replaced six times during their ownership of the coach. The last time was in Cabazon, California, where the temperature was 120 degrees Fahrenheit. With help from a local garage proprietor, they found a replacement engine in a junkyard. This same gentleman also gave them the use of his garage and equipment and told them just to lock the door when they were finished. After returning home from this episode, Don replaced the

Pontiac engine with a 336-cid GMC V-8, mated to an Allison six-speed transmission. This solved the engine problems created by the underpowered Pontiac power plants.

In 1969 Don purchased a GM 4104 from Hausman Bus in Chicago, Illinois. Don worked on this conversion in the driveway at his home. The coach was equipped with a split air system, a quiet generator, and a Formica interior. One day a fellow stopped by and wanted to buy the coach. Don told him it wasn't for sale but that he would build another one for him. This was the beginning of the yet unnamed "Hoffman Coach Company." That first 4104 cost \$30,000 for the completed conversion, a price that included the cost of the bus. Later that year, Don converted a Marmon Herrington. The Hoffmans paid \$13,000 for the bus, and the conversion added \$41,000, for a completed cost of \$54,000. In 1970 Don added on to his garage so he could put buses inside. Up to this time, the buses had to be kept outdoors, and Don used a plastic tarp to connect the garage door to the bus, thereby heating the bus interior. The exterior work could be done only when weather permitted. The Hoffmans created a conversion using their first new



Possibilities for interior floor plans and décor are endless



The owner of a Hoffman Coach creation hitches up his towed vehicle in front of the Hoffman facility and prepares to hit the highway

shell, a Scandia, in 1972. In 1975 they received a new MCI shell, which had been ordered two years earlier. The energy crisis of the 1970s had created a high demand for mass transportation, so there was a considerable waiting period for new shells. Just prior to delivery of the new MCI, Don received a call from a gentleman named Ed Hill, who wanted to buy the bus and conversion for a rock star — none other than Elvis Presley. Don declined; he had waited too long for this bus! In 1978 the Hoffmans converted the first 35-foot Prevost shell for Tom Harbison, one of the owners of the motorhome division of Prevost Car.

In the early days, Don and Margaret did all of the conversion work themselves. “He did everything and I covered it up,” Margaret said. She installed all of the ceilings, carpet, and upholstery.

As the Hoffman children, Tim, Bonnie, Debbie, and Jeff, became old enough to help, they joined the work force. In 1990 the Hoffmans doubled the size of the garage. They also added a cabinet shop and a second level for parts and office space.

Today Tim specializes in generator installations, plumbing, and tanks, Debbie installs carpeting, wall coverings, window treatments, and upholstery and helps with laminates. Her husband, Doug, does most of the cabinet work, Corian installation, and tile work. Jeff specializes in Naugahyde application and does some cabinet work and electronics. Don still does a good part of the electrical installations, and Margaret continues to make all of the stained glass, which has become a hallmark feature of the company’s conversions. Bonnie and her husband, Ken, now own

and operate a service station next door. Ultimately, Don and Margaret plan to turn the family business over to the children.

Hoffman Coach produces four to six new coaches per year. In addition, they do numerous VCR installations for charter buses. They still convert a few older coaches, and occasionally a fortunate owner can enlist Hoffman Coach to remodel his or her existing coach conversion.

Hoffman Coach offers a variety of floor plans, all of which can be customized for specific needs. The Hoffmans are skilled at using all types of materials—natural woods, laminates, Vitricor, Corian, Fountainhead, and ceramic or marble tile. The customer has a limitless choice of decor and design. The Hoffmans take special care to ensure quality workmanship. For instance, to eliminate squeaks, the cupboards are built and laminated in the shop and then installed in the coach. They take the time to do it right the first time and pay close attention to details. They are so confident in their work that every coach carries a lifetime guarantee for original and subsequent owners.

The breadth of knowledge exhibited by Don Hoffman is most impressive. In fact, we would consider him to be one of the foremost experts on all aspects of bus conversions. The most important endorsement, however, is that nearly anyone who owns a Hoffman Coach claims Don and Margaret as friends. They truly epitomize all that FMCA stands for.

For more information, contact Hoffman Coach Company, US, Route 6, P.O. Box 337, Clarendon, PA 16313; (814) 723-4550.