

ALAN CHRISTIANSON

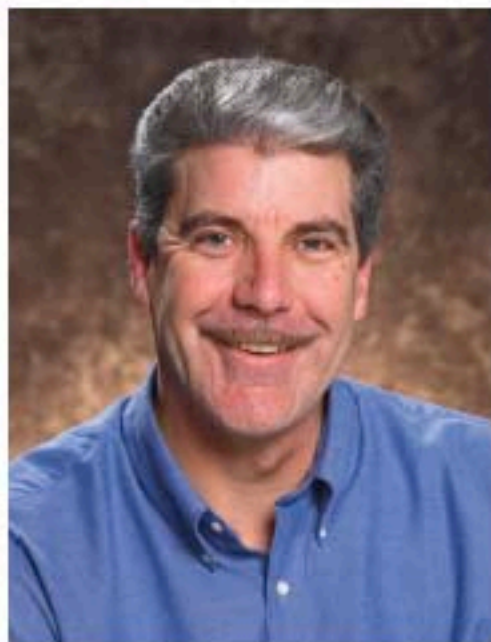
Marathon From the Very Beginning

by Mary Barton

With Marathon building its 1000th coach, it seems appropriate to reflect upon the company's history. A good place to start that process at Marathon Coach is to speak with Alan Christianson, Vice President of Interior Design and Engineering. Alan has the distinction of being Marathon's first employee. He was hired on September 1, 1983, and he continues to be an integral part of the current and future design of the company's custom coaches.

Alan came on board as a designer and cabinet builder, along with four other artisans. The first day of work was occupied with purchasing tools, setting up an inventory, and building workbenches and a wall to separate the cabinet shop from the main floor. In the days to follow, the five of them ran air lines and poured a cement pad for the shop's dust collector at the former plant site at 5th and Bertelson in Eugene, Oregon.

"The first eight coaches we built were on the MCI chassis,"



Alan said. "We used a lot more wood back then. Koa is one of the most popular woods, and in those coaches, we installed solid koa window frames, ceiling frames and dashes. All the mold-

ings were either handmade from koa or from teak that we applied with a cherry stain to match the koa. We used a Formica koa laminate on the cabinets and walls (which is now discontinued) and it was a very nice complement to the solid koa hardwood."

"Then we did our first Prevost conversion for an owner out of New York. At the completion of that, sales went crazy. The Prevosts seem to have struck a cord with the market, probably due to the difference in appearance of their higher profile windows (versus the solely horizontal ones). Prevost was also very accommodating in making adjustments in the chassis construction and worked with us in trying to make the motorhome conversion easier. It wasn't as cost effective for MCI to make alterations because the bulk of their revenue came from the transportation side of things. Prevost made a real effort to listen and accommodate us, if possible."

As Alan says, design, like anything else, revolves. In the past several years, Marathon has used more wood laminates in the coaches, primarily due to the increased quality and depth of the prints on the laminates. In the mid-90's, Marathon rarely used any wood or wood laminates. It went from wood to non-wood coaches, and now there's probably an equal mix of both styles.

The introduction of slideouts to the bus conversions several years back has had a major impact on the designs of the coaches. Now they are very similar to studio apartments and provide owners with added livability value as a result of the extra space. But other innovations have fueled changes in the coaches, too.

"What we're building today," Alan said, "is dynamically im-

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proved because of technology. Technology gives us new materials, processes, and appliances so we can give our coaches different aesthetic looks while improving function and comfort. An example would be the in-motion satellite receiver as one of the biggest innovations, which allows owners to watch TV while they're driving down the road. LED lighting is big because it conserves electricity and with its long life, allows us to put lights in places that are a little less convenient to service."

"In the coaches, we are now able to control things more easily. One example is having the Crestron, combined with our TechLink, system. It gives you a highly efficient, easy-to-operate vehicle. The whole idea of an RV is about enjoying life, not complicating it. It's about relaxation, and seeing things, experiencing things, and enjoying the coach. It's not about becoming frustrated because you can't turn on 14 audio/visual components to watch a movie."

According to Alan, Marathon produces the best bus conversion in the world. "There is no doubt," he said. "When we started, we had this ideal of what we wanted to achieve: We wanted to build the best coach in the world. We wanted to build it the most efficient way possible. We wanted to use the best materials and we didn't want to take shortcuts. We wanted ours to be the best operating coaches out there. We had, and we still have,

standards that we won't compromise in any area. I think that has driven Marathon's success, but the company always has room to improve. That is something Bob Schoellhorn says every time he visits our facility: 'We can always do better.' At Marathon, we try to foster the attitude to embrace change. We see change as something to look forward to, to improve both our products and processes."

"I would be remiss not to mention all the input supplied by our customers, which has helped evolve our coaches into the superior products they are today. They provide us with a wealth of information and ideas. They also have been a lot of fun to work with. We have so many loyal customers whom we have known since the very beginning of the company. Many have become very good friends and are literally part of the Marathon Coach family."

"I have been very blessed to work with so many talented, creative and wonderful people, and for a company that has high ethical values in the way it treats its customers and employees," he continued. "Marathon's goal is to make its customers proud owners of its product with the knowledge that they will be supported. The company's incentives have been to treat customers the way they like to be treated. Working for a company that maintains that attitude is not something you should take for granted. It's great to represent a company you respect."

The next time you're in Oregon, stop by and visit with Alan. He would be more than happy to share stories with you about Marathon. Since he's been here from the very beginning, he ought to know. •