

# The Bests

## In The Bus

Howard and Ellen Best of Kingston, Georgia have been full timing in their bus, living their “charmed lifestyle” for over 23 years. Their 1976 MCI-8 began life as a tour bus in Germany, hauling 47 passengers to destinations throughout the country.

This is their first bus, but previously, they converted a school bus into a motor home and traveled extensively in that until 1985 when Howard found the MCI in Germany, although he was in Pennsylvania at the time. They hit the open road in 1987 and haven’t looked back since.

The Series 50 Detroit Diesel has an eight speed manual transmission and has turned over 1,360,000 miles. Howard estimates their annual mileage is about 10,000 miles a year, down from a high of about 24,000 in the past. When asked about annual mileage and expenses, Howard pulled out a very detailed and thick logbook with all their information on the bus, along with all their expenses and mileage at a glance. Howard can flip to any day on any trip and tell you how much diesel he bought, along with lots of other details.



Ellen and Howard at Arcadia Bussin' 2010



Article & Photos By Wendy Crosby

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The bus still has the bus windows; they have not been converted to RV windows like in many coaches and Howard says, "They work fine." The bus roof has not been raised, but even though Howard is tall, this has never been a problem and the bus is comfortably roomy inside. They tow a Chevy Suburban behind the bus.

Speaking from experience, Howard advises new coach owners to remove the coach air conditioning systems because they get too expensive, but leave in the coach heat. If they need to use air conditioning while they are running down the road, they fire up the generator.

And speaking of the generator, Howard has some recommendations. Once, during a long hill climb outside Salt Lake City, Ellen noticed that flames were shooting out the back end of the bus, alerting Howard, "Hey, we're on fire!" Fortunately, the generator has always been housed in a steel box in the bay to keep that kept the fire contained and from traveling to other parts of the bus, resulting in little damage except to the generator itself.

The MCI is 96 inches wide, not the wider 102," which can make a big difference. Ellen describes it in a positive way, saying she doesn't have to move around too much while cooking. They are reassured by the strength and durability of the bus as opposed to an RV; Howard emphasizes this factor, saying the bus is "built to run." Howard estimates their fully loaded weight as about 40,000 pounds and says, "All these buses are overweight."

A professional converted the interior of the bus, but they have added their own touches as the years go by. Ellen collects penguins and they can be found all over the coach, hanging from ceilings, adorning end tables and as refrigerator magnets. The refrigerator is covered with photos of family and their travels. The sitting area is warm and inviting with curtains, shades and carpet and a braided rug in the kitchen. Ellen describes her decorating scheme; "I like brown." Their bedroom features a full size waterbed, which, on the



*Views forward and back of living area show all the comforts of home with lots of personal style on display*



*Hairy Saturday, the cat has a large bell and a tether to keep track of his whereabouts. At left, family photos on refrigerator add touches of home and family*

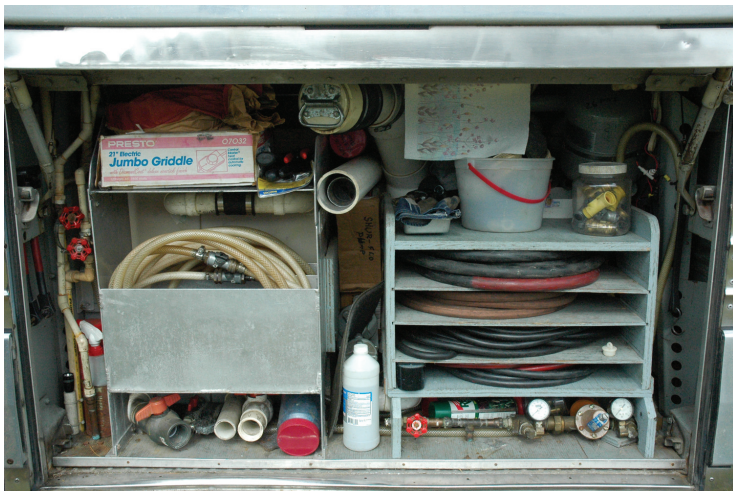
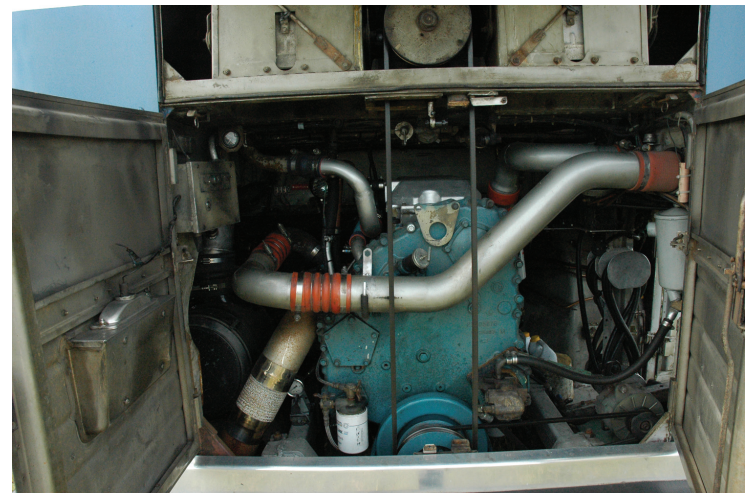
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Generator housed in a steel box keeps fire contained while hill climbing outside Salt Lake City

coach's maiden voyage, caused a mini tsunami when the bus got under power. Ellen said that she was trying to lie down on the bed to keep the water in place until they got going. Now a seat belt like arrangement keeps the water in place. Howard maintains the outside and all the systems of the bus. Ellen says he is "always working on something."

Howard was a driver and in the truck repair business before launching into the conversion project and they have taken to the lifestyle with full enthusiasm. Some of their more memorable trips include traveling to Alaska twice, as well as touring the majestic Pacific Northwest and Columbia River Gorge. Ellen especially likes Mt. Rushmore and they have been there several times. "It is just astounding that they were able to carve out those faces in the rock at that



Organization is essential while full-timing. Howard has his bays fully loaded with all items visible and easily accessible

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scale; it always amazes me when I see it." During their travels in South Dakota, they have watched the progress of the Crazy Horse Monument being built through its long history.

They have been to all 48 of the continental United States, many more than once. Being from Georgia, with family still based there, they are partial to the woodsy greenness of the Southeastern portion of the US and not that crazy about the Southwest, "Too brown and dry." They try to stay away from the craziness of places like Quartzsite, Arizona, which they describe as a "madhouse."

They describe the full timer experience as having very few drawbacks. They are members of Good Sam and FMCA and say the Escapees publications are essential for full timers. They are also members of the Elks and stay at Elks Lodges throughout the country, as well as state parks. They rarely stay at campgrounds and like to be on their own, "just the two of us." Their state of legal residence is Texas, where they receive their Escapee mail service, which they have high praise for.

As for cooking on the road, they travel with a full size refrigerator covered with family photos and they like to "keep it simple," grilling outside for lots of their meals. For a pick-up meal, they like the rotisserie chickens at Wal Mart and they often eat out with friends.

Their cat travels with them; he is a long haired 20-year-old who has been with them for years. They found him on a Saturday, and he was hairy, so his name is Hairy Saturday. He sported a sleek shave during our meeting and Ellen had him outfitted in newborn baby clothes to keep the chill off. He is on a tether so they can keep track of where he is.

Like other full timers, Ellen and Howard stress that to make things run smoothly, you have to really like each other and be compatible. Tensions can run high, so it's important to "work things out, and move on." They will celebrate fifty years of marriage this year on September 17, which they will spend in either upstate New York or Pennsylvania. So much for having an agenda!

For Ellen, one of the hardest things about the full time lifestyle to get used to was not having a home and big kitchen to prepare holiday meals for family gatherings. Her daughter-in-law has continued the family traditions, however, and Ellen gets to help out with preparations for celebrations with family. They built a 30 x 60 foot building on their son's (formerly their) property in Georgia that they drive the bus into and use as a home base.



*Water bed secured by "seat belt" keeps the water calm when bus is in motion.*



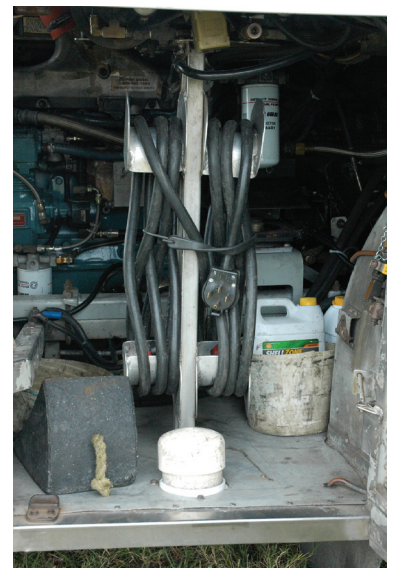
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After being on the road for 22 years, they are starting to look at spending more time in Georgia, so they may begin to adapt the building and finish part of it as living quarters when they're not on the road. Howard badly wants to put in a pit so he can get to the bottom of the bus, but there are some tricky EPA regulations to navigate that could make it a slow process. The building is not heated, and can get a little cool in December, but the bus systems keep them comfortable.

Ellen and Howard are excellent ambassadors of the full time bus lifestyle. They are relaxed and friendly and more than willing to share their experiences with others who are just getting started. If you are lucky enough to spend some time with them as they continue their travels, you will gain a new perspective on living full time in a bus. Try it—You'll like it!



*Everything in its place... including kitty Hairy Saturday with tether and bell*



Wendy Crosby is a freelance graphic designer and photographer based in Kansas City—for now—with her husband, Jim Wilkerson. She is Editor of two classic car magazines and a frequent contributor to automotive publications, including *Bus Conversions Magazine*. Visit [wcrosby.com](http://wcrosby.com) to stay updated with their news and introduction into "Coach Culture."