Best ever Busworld in Kortrijk

The 24th edition of Busworld Europe was held for the last time in the Kortrijk Xpo Centre from 20 to 25 October. Everyone agreed that it was the best ever event in Kortrijk.

There were 376 exhibitors from 36 countries and a grand total of 37,241 visitors from 118 countries, an all-time record.

Immediately before and during Busworld there were 34 press conferences and numerous new product launches. Busworld welcomed more than 300 members of the press from 42 countries to report on the event.

The halls and the temporary pavilions were packed and very busy. There was a lively buzz about the whole Busworld event with many exhibitors reporting keen interest in their products and long action lists to follow up after Busworld closed.

There was some understandable sadness that this was the last Busworld to be held in Kortrijk but demand for exhibition space is at an all-time high and that trend will continue. In the city bus market sector, there was a wide variety of drivetrains and fuel systems, including diesel, biodiesel, compressed natural gas, biogas, other synthetic and renewable fuels, hybrid and all-electric systems.

The next edition of Busworld Europe will be held in Brussels from 18 to 23 October 2019 and the planning has already started.

The exhibition facilities are much larger than Kortrijk Xpo and travel to and from the exhibition should be much easier. Brussels is a major international city with a wide variety of hotels and good communications.
There were more than 60 potential exhibitors at Busworld in Kortrijk this year but there was simply not any space for them. We hope to see all of them and many more participating in the next edition of Busworld Europe.

The timing is potentially excellent. By then, all the major European manufacturers will have all-electric city buses available and they are anticipating several large scale tenders for delivery from 2020 as the electrification of city services starts to make rapid progress.

There were several new coach models at Busworld Europe. Some had been introduced to comply with the more stringent R66-02 rollover standards on passenger survivability. Others were filling what had previously been gaps in their model ranges, for instance the tri-axle low entry Iveco Crossway that can have suburban and interurban applications.

As always, the Turkish manufacturing industry was strongly represented. There has recently been pressure on public spending, including fleet renewal, although Istanbul has ambitious plans for electric buses. The Turkish manufacturers were quick to respond with smaller and competitively priced midibuses that use high volume components.

The variety of minibuses and minicoaches was wider than ever, including the introduction of electric models. While the capital costs are still considerably higher than conventional diesel vehicles, the running costs per kilometre can be much lower, therefore whole life operating costs have to be taken into account by potential purchasers. There is also the added bonus of zero emission travel in urban centres and this is appealing to politicians and the general public.

Irizar must be congratulated on winning the coveted “International Coach of the Year 2018” award, given after judging of a number of competitive vehicles by a jury of 20 or so trade journalists, each representing a leading magazine in their own country. The i8 coach has stunning style, coupled with superb driver and passenger safety and comfort.

Irizar also introduced its articulated all-electric city bus that is now going into series production in a new factory near San Sebastian. The company announced one of the largest orders during Busworld, with 43 to be delivered to the French city of Amiens.

Hess of Switzerland signed a contract with the city of Nantes to deliver 22 bi-articulated all-electric buses in the autumn of next year. They will be used on very frequent services on a dedicated busway and will have highly advanced flash-charging technology capable of giving the batteries a 600kW boost in 20 seconds at selected stops while passengers are getting on and off the vehicles. It will take less than one second to connect the vehicle to the overhead charging point.

Contracts like these are at the leading edge of city bus technology, but they offer high flexibility and can be installed faster than a tramway and at much lower capital cost.

At Busworld, demonstration vehicles were parked outside several of the halls and their customers.

Planning has already started for Busworld Europe in Brussels in 2019 and many exhibitors have said that they want to take space. It will take time to work with the Brussels team but a floor plan should be available no later than May next year and exhibitors will be notified when orders can be placed for space.

The Busworld team looks forward to welcoming all exhibitors, visitors and media to our new and larger home in Brussels in 2019.
Busworld Latin America

Following the very successful first edition last year, the second edition of Busworld Latin America will be held in the Plaza Mayor in Medellin, the second city of Colombia from 5 to 7 December this year.

Colombia relies heavily on buses and coaches for public transport. In the main cities there are extensive Bus Rapid Transit networks with vehicles running on separate roads serving stations with platforms that are level with the floor of the bus. Very high numbers of passengers can be moved per direction per hour.

Smaller buses are used to provide feeder services and for rural routes. The industry is still largely based on chassis from one builder and bodywork from another. Colombia has an active bodybuilding sector making a wide variety of vehicles.

Fabio Rodriguez, Manager of Busworld Latin America, visited Busworld Europe and said that demand for exhibition space in Medellin was high and he expected a lively fair with plenty of opportunities to do business.

He was well aware that there had been a lot of adverse publicity about the financial problems in neighbouring Venezuela and, to a lesser extent, in Brazil. He said that business in Colombia had not been affected by these problems and that demand for new buses and coaches, and all the associated services, remained strong.

Other markets in the region were also healthy and he expected Busworld Latin America to draw visitors from neighbouring countries. There are strong free trade agreements between most countries in Latin America and the region is well worth a visit.
Prior to the opening of Busworld, teams of judges assessed a range of vehicles for overall comfort and safety and also outstanding features. The awards were given at the Busworld Awards Night.

Daimler Buses won the Grand Award Bus with the new Citaro Hybrid city bus. This vehicle is probably best described as a mild hybrid with a relatively simple and lightweight design that gives a boost to the acceleration of the vehicle on leaving a bus stop. Daimler Buses reckons that the cost of the hybrid system can be recovered within three to five years, depending on the operating conditions.

MAN won the Grand Award Coach with the latest version of the Lion’s Coach. The judges were impressed by the total package that combined efficiency, safety and design in one unique unit. The Lion’s Coach had its world première at Busworld. Its features included LED headlights and rear lights and a more powerful and efficient D26 engine. It also complied with the latest R66-02 roll-over standard. This impressive coach also won the Comfort Label and the Design Label.

Two electric city buses won Ecology Labels, namely the VDL Citea SLF-120 Electric bus and the Yutong E12LF bus.

In addition to MAN’s award of a Comfort Label for the new Lion’s Coach, Iveco picked up the same award for the Crealis bus designed for rapid transit systems.

Design Labels went to MAN for the Lion’s Coach, to Mercedes-Benz for the new Tourismo M/2 coach and to BMC with its Neocity low floor bus.

Mercedes-Benz took both Safety Labels, one for the Tourismo M/2 and the other for the Citaro Hybrid.

An Innovation Label was awarded to Alstom/NTL for the Aptis electric bus, built by the former Lohr with many Alstom components. One could see the influence of Alstom’s tram and train design experience, because the vehicle had its axles at the extreme front and rear. This resulted in a completely flat floor in the passenger area with no intrusions, but the very long wheelbase made turning more difficult, even with a steering rear axle. Aptis vehicles are on trial in France but routes will have to be chosen carefully to avoid tight turns.

The fact that three electric city buses won awards is significant, while the coach awards went to the latest MAN and Mercedes-Benz models that have structures designed to comply with R66-02 roll-over standards.

Sustainable bus awards

For the first time at the Busworld Awards Night, the Sustainable Bus Awards 2018 were handed out. Sustainable Bus of the Year (SBY) was created and promoted by the specialised Italian magazine, “Autobus”, and other publications have since joined.

It is believed to be the first and only European award that acknowledges sustainability in the field of buses. The prize aims to play a role in promoting a new mobility culture, not only encouraging the use of the most advanced technologies in terms of low environmental impact but also taking into account safety of vehicles; in other words, the capability of the vehicle to reduce danger for passengers, pedestrians and drivers.

Sustainability also means establishing a positive image of the vehicle in the eyes of the general public. Therefore, several aspects can come into play, such as noise, recyclability of components and the general environmental commitment of the manufacturer.

VDL won the Sustainable Urban Bus 2018 with the Citea SLFA Electric articulated bus. The Sustainable Intercity Bus Award went to the Iveco Crossway LE Natural Power. This had a patented arrangement where the gas tanks were mounted at the front of the bus, partly protruding at roof level (but no more than an air conditioning unit) and partly through the roof of the passenger area, still leaving headroom for the tallest passengers because the floor in the front part of the vehicle was only one step above the ground.

The Sustainable Coach Award 2018 was given to the Setra S 516 HD/L2 luxury coach. This coach has an overall length of 13.115 metres on two axles and is popular in markets which legally permit two axle coaches to operate at up to 19 tonnes gross.
Neoplan Skyliner celebrates 50 years

Visitors to Busworld Europe could not fail to notice old and new Neoplan Skyliner double deck coaches parked prominently outside the South entrance to Kortrijk Xpo.

Konrad Auwärter was the founder of the double deck coach concept. He and Bob Lee, the legendary designer, were present at celebrations in Busworld to mark the 50th anniversary of the design and the delivery of Skyliner number 5,000 to a loyal and regular customer in Italy.

Konrad Auwärter developed the concept and the prototype as part of his university studies at a time when the use of double deck coaches was unknown. There were fears that they would prove to be unstable at speed on motorways but that was quickly disproved.

He recalled that demand for the concept came first from tour operators in West Berlin, whose customers wanted to be able to look over the Berlin Wall and see what conditions were like in the Eastern half of the divided city.

These were the very first double deck vehicles for city sightseeing. The concept has spread rapidly, initially using time-expired double deck city buses converted to open top. These had old generation diesel engines with consequent high levels of pollution in sensitive city centres.

More recently, there has been demand for sightseeing double deck buses with the latest low emission diesel engines and a few examples powered by electric batteries. This specialised industry has come a long way since Konrad Auwärter’s original concept.

Nowadays the Skyliner is widely used on longer distance express services and excursions. The fuel burn per occupied seat is remarkably low and compares very favourably with every other form of travel, including cars, trains and aircraft.

The first Neoplan Skyliners were built on three axles, but Neoplan went on to develop the four axle 15-metre Megaliner and at least one articulated Jumboliner. The turntable was at inter-deck height, offering a through upper deck.

For many years, Skyliners were built in the former factory in the suburbs of Stuttgart, but now they are made in MAN’s modern factory in Ankara, Turkey.

Van Hool celebrates 70 years

It was 70 years ago that Bernard Van Hool founded his company in the small Flemish town Koningshooikt, originally building bus and coach bodywork on a variety of chassis.

The company grew quickly and soon started to build integral buses and coaches that is still one of its main activities alongside an industrial unit that builds tankers, trailers and other equipment for road transport operators.

Van Hool had a large and impressive stand at Busworld. They always resist the temptation to pack it full of vehicles. Instead there is plenty of space for visitors to study the vehicles and look at their features. The first visual impression of a coach can often be important in a buying decision.

Van Hool displayed two high capacity Exqui. City vehicles. One was the first of 30 articulated hybrid vehicles ordered by the Northern Ireland Executive for the Belfast Rapid Transit system that is due to open in September next year.

Alongside it was the first of 20 24-metre bi-articulated Exqui.City trolleybuses for the city of Linz, Austria. This well-equipped vehicle had batteries that enabled it to operate up to 5km independently, off the overhead wiring.

Filip Van Hool, CEO, said that his company had major plans for expansion in Macedonia and the United States. The four original production lines in the factory in Skopje had been doubled to cope with demand for CX coaches for North America and EX models for Europe.

He said that future plans included developing a new city bus for European markets. It would be built wholly or largely in Macedonia in order to be competitive in price. He referred to buses built by competitors in other lower cost countries and believed that Van Hool had to follow their example.

He also said that Van Hool would open a factory in the United States to build city buses and commuter coaches that were bought with Federal funding and therefore had to comply with buy-American rules and high US content.

Van Hool had already developed the CX4SE electric coach with Proterra. He predicted demand for that type of vehicle in states where there is major concern about pollution. The electric coach would be ideal for home to work contracts that did not require high daily miles or significant under floor luggage capacity.

He said that, in the United States, it took no longer than two days to receive the necessary permits for construction of a new factory. In Belgium, it takes around ten months to receive a permit for an internal renovation inside a factory.

He recounted that he had visited five states to look at potential sites. “The Governor of one state came to my desk in Koningshooikt in person with all the required permits only one week later.”

Van Hool has also looked East. It has imported double deck coaches with Scania to Japan and is also developing markets in Australia and New Zealand. The company has come a long way in 70 years!
Thank you Kortrijk

On the last day of Busworld, Mieke Glorieux, Director of Busworld Europe, took time to give thanks to exhibitors and visitors to Busworld Europe.

Mieke talked about the challenge of Busworld Europe 2019 in Brussels and said it would be a quite a task because her team had to organise everything practically from scratch. The layout of the halls is different and the team would also have to look at the logistics services.

Mieke said that the Kortrijk Xpo employees were familiar with Busworld and revealed that the entire team from Kortrijk Xpo would move with Busworld to Brussels for the 25th edition of Busworld in 2019.

Mieke admitted that emotionally it was hard for her and especially for her father, Luc, to leave Kortrijk behind. Busworld had a huge economic impact on the city and surrounding towns. The last edition of Busworld had been the most perfect which was all due to the cooperation of everyone.

"Thank you Kortrijk".

Turkish export growth

Speaking at Busworld Europe in Kortrijk, Serdar Görgüç, General Manager of Otokar, said that, in the last four years, Turkey's bus exports had increased by 39%. In the first eight months of 2017, the increase was 8%. Turkish manufacturers were strongly represented in Busworld Europe with a very wide range of products.

The next edition of Busworld Turkey will be held in the Aegean city of Izmir from 19 to 21 April next year. There is still time to participate in this leading exhibition in a very important regional market.

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