China / Colombia / Brazil – At the inaugural Busworld Latin America exhibition in Medellin Colombia last month, Rene Medeiros, commercial director of Songz Automobile Air Conditioning Co Ltd for the Brazilian market said the air conditioning and refrigeration systems supplier had recently established a sales and service office in Sao Paulo, Brazil and that, eventually, it planned to establish an assembly plant for customers in Brazil and other South American countries. (Bus air conditioning units are currently shipped complete from China to Latin America for fitment by either the OE or by the local aftermarket service partner).

With sales already established in Colombia, Chile and Ecuador, the market for air conditioning in Brazil is set to expand significantly, said Medeiros, as air conditioning in some of Brazil’s major cities, which can reach temperatures of 45 degrees, are to make fitment of air conditioning systems in new buses compulsory. For instance, 100% of new buses delivered to the City of Rio de Janeiro from December 1, 2016 are to be fitted with air conditioning. This same regulation will apply to Sao Paulo from June 1, 2017. Sao Paulo, said Medeiros, has a bus population of some 15,000 units. All buses are fitted with a manufacturers’ and operators’ date and after a period of ten years, it is mandatory to replace the vehicle.

Medeiros said that it also plans to bring the Songz range of truck refrigeration to Brazil.

Argentina / Colombia – With start of production scheduled for the end of this year, Argentina’s largest seat manufacturer, Faic, Technologies en Asientos (Faic) of Rosario, is setting up a new plant in Pereira, Colombia for manufacturing and supplying seats to customers in the USA, Canada and Central America.

Dr Marcelo Prat, commercial director for Faic, explained that over the next ten months it would be installing equipment to manufacture and assemble a full range of seats with start of production scheduled for November / December 2016. The first seats manufactured are to be its high-end luxury large executive leather coach seats, followed by its textile (Epingle) coach seat range and then finally its vinyl (Spalding) bus seat range. The project is expected to be fully-operational over the next two to three years. The operation is to be based in the free trade zone of Pereira from where it can more easily supply and service its North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) customers as well as others in the Andean community of South America such as Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Venezuela. Asked why Faic chose Colombia, Prat said that it has a free trade agreement with the United States.

Brazil – With an investment allocation totalling BRL70m (USD22m) Mercedes-Benz do Brasil has announced it has started construction of its first test / proving grounds for commercial vehicles in Brazil.

The new testing ground facility, which is located in Iracemápolis, adjacent to its new car plant that was inaugurated last year, is to be used for the international development of trucks and buses. The facilities are to extend to 1.3 million square metres (sq m), where 18 asphalt, concrete and off-road tracks are to be built, providing a total test track length of 22km.

The site was chosen for the 2.5 million square metres of land and its location in the interior of Sao Paulo which is much more accessible for the company’s technicians, who are located in Sao Bernardo.

Philipp Schiemer, Mercedes-Benz president of Brazil, stated that it would be the largest and most comprehensive commercial vehicle testing ground in the Southern Hemisphere. The opening of the test track is scheduled for the end of 2017. Strong financial incentives through the government body, Inovar-Auto, was another key reason the location, Schiemer also acknowledged.

When this facility comes on stream, Mercedes-Benz will no longer use rented tracks. The work undertaken will be for both local and international projects, and compatible with the Mercedes-Benz facilities at its main factory and truck development centre in Wörth, Germany.

Schiemer said: “We are going to undertake tests here in several commercial vehicles within the group, that require more severe conditions of application, which are not found in Europe.” He added that despite this most unfavourable phase in Brazil’s market economy, this investment shows that Mercedes continues to believe in Brazil. Schiemer believes that there is a long way to go over the next few years because the Brazilian truck and bus fleet is driven by diesel and the country needs to replace those trucks that are more than 20 years old in order to improve the environment, which, represents 30% of the national fleet!
Busworld Latin America in Medellin highlights the growth potential of the Colombian bus and coach market

Colombia - The first Busworld Latin America took place in Medellin, Colombia, last month, a country where the general view of the exhibitors’ was that it is becoming one of the most important and fastest growing markets in Latin America. Colombia is an extremely mountainous country with very hilly topography even in the main cities, which traditionally prescribe, for the most part, high floor buses for cities, interurban and intercity / tourism transport. The bus and coach market, which has been between 3,000 and 4,000 units a year, is a body on chassis market with the majority of small and medium-sized vehicles built on truck chassis and with the larger heavy-duty coaches being built on a mix of front and rear engine dedicated coach chassis. According to NPU, there are four licensed chassis assemblers in Colombia, which are all based in Bogota – Isuzu / Chevrolet Hino, Mercedes-Benz and NPU – to supply small and medium chassis, whereas for the heavy-duty coach market there are importers like Volvo and Scania as well as the first three former Bogota assemblers, which also supply heavy-duty chassis from their operations in Brazil.

Exhibitors at the show said the country’s government was looking to take steps to improve many aspects of the passenger transportation industry with introduction of new regulations to improve build quality, safety, accessibility, vehicle fuel efficiency and the environment. There is talk that the country will move from Euro IV to Euro V during the second quarter this year – although some of the chassis manufacturers like Mercedes-Benz, Volvo and Scania are already offering just Euro V compliant vehicles as standard. New regulations also mean that from January 1, 2017, all new city buses must have wheelchair access and from July 1, 2017 this will also apply to intercity or interurban models. Dholandiand Colombia was on-hand at the show to display a variety of options for CNG to use to meet these new accessibility regulations. In terms of safety, according to a Scania representative, anti-lock braking becomes mandatory in all buses and coaches from January 1, 2017. In addition, the country is in the process of signing a peace agreement with the guerrillas after 50 years of war and the government is investing heavily in infrastructure, according Benoit Tanguy, managing director of Scania Colombia. This includes development of infrastructure in parts of the country where most of the population has not been before, which again is expected to boost demand for coaches. “This market will grow significantly,” added Tanguy. He added that there were a lot of opportunities in the city of Bogota, because of Cartagena, which started BRT in the country, a city with a population of one million inhabitants, has strong opportunities for new and replacement BRT vehicle and systems; this can also be said of the other main cities of Cali, Bogota and Medellin.

The show had no fewer than seven chassis suppliers and more than a dozen bus body builders represented. The highlights was the world premiere of the bi-articulated high floor gas bus prototype built jointly by partners Scania and Busscar de Colombia for trials in Bogota. The partnership is co-owned by a third partner, Fenosa, the company responsible for the supply of the natural gas and fuelling infrastructure. Below is a summary of the new products and developments at the show.

Scania offers safety systems as standard

Bogota / Brazil – Launched as a world premiere, Scania Colombia SAS of Bogota, together with its chassis manufacturing partner, Busscar de Colombia SAS of Pereira, and gas network supplier, gasnatural fenosa of Bogota, Colombia, displayed a 27m bi-articulated high floor BRT CNG bus for trial by the transportation authorities in Bogota.

The prototype vehicle offers a capacity of 250 passengers, ABS (anti-lock braking), EBS (electronic braking system) and safety systems, including Opticruise (automatic transmission), stated Benoit Tanguy, managing director of Scania Colombia. This includes development of infrastructure in parts of the country where most of the population has not been before, which again is expected to boost demand for coaches. “This market will grow significantly,” added Tanguy. He added that there were a lot of opportunities in the city of Bogota, because of Cartagena, which started BRT in the country, a city with a population of one million inhabitants, has strong opportunities for new and replacement BRT vehicle and systems; this can also be said of the other main cities of Cali, Bogota and Medellin.

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Check whether there is too much / too little air or too much too little fuel in order to stabilise the burn inside the engine and to provide the power demand at any given time. This technology thus allows the vehicle to operate at higher altitudes since there is no longer a fixed ratio between gas and air, stated Salgado. He added that the engine offers better efficiency as well as much cleaner exhaust emissions to Euro 6 standards. The stoichiometric engine is highly flexible with regards to the gas quality as sensors are also used to monitor this and to adjust the burn accordingly. This allows both the natural gas and biogas to be used as a single source or equally, as a blend of both.

Benoit Tanguy, managing director of Scania Colombia said that Colombia and particularly Bogota was in the top three markets in Latin America with huge potential for fleet renewal. Tanguy said it was not easy to start such a project on its own and it was necessary to work with partners to design, develop and deliver the complete solution for the customer. Tanguy added that this partnership strategy ensures that Scania can maintain control properly during its lifetime.

According to Alejandro Robredo, director general, Busscar de Colombia, the biggest challenge had been designing the body structure to accommodate ten CNG cylinders on either side of the chassis and under the floor, whilst ensuring the correct weight distribution. He said as this was the first CNG powered bus it had developed for the Colombian market and specifically for Bogota. There are five CNG tanks located on either side of the chassis, of different sizes and located in the front and mid-section of the vehicle. The vehicle structure is made of stainless steel with a corrosion protection inside (wax) and out (paint).

Robredo said this was its fifth new vehicle design since the family-owners of Busscar Colombia had acquired the remaining shares in Busscar Colombia from Brazil in 2002. Since the purchase of the remaining shares in 2014, its engineers have developed and launched four new vehicles, these include; an 18m articulated diesel bus for Mexico City, a double deck coach body for Colombia; an 18m bus body on a Euro 6 CNG chassis for Cartagena (22 are in operation and 32 are to be delivered by June 2017) and an intercity 13m 3.6m high model. Robredo said that Busscar produces approximately 1,000 units a year and holds a market share of some 60% of Colombia’s BRT operations and about 25% of the Colombian bus and coach market overall. It employs about a 1,000 people and its biggest investment in recent years has been in engineering and R&D.

Scania offers safety systems as standard

Brazil - While ABS is to become mandatory in all buses and coaches from January 1, 2017, Scania Latin America Ltd, which has a long history in the country, said that Colombia and particularly Bogota was in the top three markets in Latin America with huge potential for fleet renewal. Tanguy said it was not easy to start such a project on its own and it was necessary to work with partners to design, develop and deliver the complete solution for the customer. Tanguy added that this partnership strategy ensures that Scania can maintain control properly during its lifetime.

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Meggabuses de Colombia – A new bus and coach builder

Bogota – Meggabuses de Colombia is the name of the new bus and coach builder founded by the company’s commercial director, Pedro Bohorquez some 14 months ago. Bohorquez, a former design engineer at Marcopolo said the business fulfilled his dream of building buses to his own design and that in its short existence it had built as already 80 units. On this stand two vehicles were on display, a 7m (28 seats) and a 9m (40 seats) coach. Bohorquez said the vehicles were built on front engine Euro 4 chassis supplied by either Isuzu Chevrolet or Hino. The body is made of modern AISI and SAE steel with treatment and painting on the upper body and sheet metal lower down. Bohorquez said he planned to expand his output and range to 12-15 coaches a month and to add 14.5m luxury single deck and double deck models to its fleet. These would be on heavy engine chassis and was discussing options with Volvo and Mercedes-Benz.

Bohorquez added that from February 2017, he planned to offer vehicles on Euro 5 chassis. He also said he was researching the world market for a coach builder, whose designs it could introduce and build for the Colombian market.

GM Isuzu to conduct trials of Isuzu ERGA CNG-powered low-entry city bus

Bogota – General Motors Isuzu Camiones Andinos* of Bogota used the show to introduce a RHD Isuzu ERGA** CNG-powered low-entry city bus imported from Japan to announce plans to conduct research trials at 2,800m in the city of Bogota.

A representative for GM Isuzu, which is a supplier of trucks and bus chassis to Colombia and surrounding markets under the joint logo of Isuzu and Chevrolet, said the trials would be without passengers but the vehicle would be artificially loaded to the maximum gross vehicle weight. The focus of the trials is to see how it operates at altitude, said the spokesman, adding that Colombia would be the trial country for the entire Latin American continent. GM Isuzu said that it planned to modify and change aspects of the engine such as introducing the new exhaust system, a treatment to the intake manifold and the direct injection system to improve its performance at altitude. Isuzu representative Erick Zamacona Aboumrad, export specialist at Isuzu, said that the trials are important as Colombia has the most developed network for CNG in Latin America. He added that the new vehicle is equipped with an automatic transmission that will give smooth and silent operation of the vehicle. It also comes equipped with a low floor area at street level, allowing for easy access even for the elderly and disabled. It has an automatic: It is has an electronic suspension system that allows equalization of suspension when stationary to ensure easy passenger access and an integrated body structure facilitating a lightweight structural design.

Orion and DINA in exclusive body and chassis partnership for luxury coaches

Mexico / Chia – Truck and bus builder, Dina Camiones SA de CV* of Mexico City, Mexico used the show to announce a new exclusive partnership with local body builder, Orion Autocarross of Chia (Bogota) Colombia. Instead of importing fully-built buses and coaches from Mexico, Dina, under this new arrangement is to supply chassis to Orion for bodying for the Colombian market; Orion will be the sole and exclusive body builder of Dina chassis. (This is a new arrangement for Orion, previously it was a chassis design allows the 2442 6x2 chassis to be used in a variety of applications, from light-duty to medium-duty conditions. The vehicle is powered by a Cummins 6.7 litre V6 turbo-diesel, Allison automatic transmission and Meritor axles. However, two models are to be offered initially, the FX Mid (as mentioned above) at 10.1m in length, 2.45m wide and 3.45m high and the FX Bus, which measures at 12.5m in length, 2.45m wide and 3.643m high and is fitted with 41 seats plus toilet.

On display at the show was the new partner’s first new prototype model, the FX. This was a 10m two-axle coach with seats for 37 passengers and toilet. The drive line consisted of a Cummins 6.7 litre V6 diesel engine, Allison automatic transmission and Meritor axles. However, two models are to be offered initially, the FX Mid (as mentioned above) at 10.1m in length, 2.45m wide and 3.45m high and the FX Bus, which measures at 12.5m in length, 2.45m wide and 3.643m high and is fitted with 41 seats plus toilet.

*Dina Camiones SA de CV* re-opened for business in 2005 following a period of the company being ‘mothballed’, whilst the family ownership was re-organised. Commercial vehicle production is in Hidalgo, Mexico. Exports to Colombia until now have been ‘mothballed’, whilst the family ownership was re-organised. Commercial vehicle production is in Hidalgo, Mexico. Exports to Colombia until now have been

Songz plans expansion in South America

Brazil - Songz Automobile Air Conditioning Co Ltd (a subsidiary of air conditioning equipment manufacturer and refrigeration group in Shanghai, China) has opened a sales subsidiary in Sao Paulo, Brazil (a subsidiary of air conditioning equipment manufacturer and refrigeration group in Shanghai, China) has opened a sales subsidiary in Sao Paulo, Brazil and is looking to set up an assembly plant in the vicinity – see separate article in this issue.

Faic building seat production facility in Pereira

Argentina / Colombia – With start of production scheduled for the end of this year, Argentina’s largest seat manufacturer, Faic Tecnologia en Asientos de Rosario, announced at the show it was setting up a new plant in Pereira for supplying to its existing customers in the USA, Canada and Central America – see details on page 1 of this issue.
**Scania to trial locally built gas-powered buses**

Brazil – Following successful trials in Brazil of a Swedish-built bio-methane / CNG fuelled interurban bus, Scania Latin America Ltda of Bernardo do Campo – SP has announced that it is to offer three vehicles built at its plant in São Paulo. These are: the high floor OK 280 4x2, which can receive bodies from 12.5 to 13.2m in length and carry from 86 to 100 passengers; the low floor K 280 6x2, 15m long, two steering-axles and capacity for up to 150 passengers - both equipped with a 290-horsepower engine - and the high floor K 320 6 x 2/2, an 18m articulated vehicle with a capacity of 160 occupants with an output of 320hp.

To begin the demonstrations, Scania plans to start demonstrations of these buses with the low floor K 280 6x2, 15m, with capacity for up to 130 passengers.

Silvio Munhoz, director of Scania’s Bus Sales in Brazil remarking on the benefit of gas buses, said: “Since Scania brought the Swedish model to Brazil at the end of 2014 for a series of presentations, the vehicle, which uses either bio methane, CNG or a mixture of both in any proportion, has aroused interest as a solution to more sustainable urban mobility. This bus draws attention to the reduction of operating costs per kilometre, as well as noise pollution and emissions. Compared with a diesel-like vehicle, in fact, it emits 85% less gaseous pollutants, if fuelled with bio methane and 70% if it has CNG.”

Whilst Scania buses - powered using bio methane or CNG, or even with the mixture of both - is already wide spread in Europe, there was still a requirement for some engineering changes locally to meet the needs of the Brazilian operator, said Scania; this was mainly to the layout of the body.

The model, however, receives the powertrain from Sweden; the engine already complies with Euro VI emissions legislation and in Brazil, the current law requires compliance with Euro V. The body structure of the low floor chassis model (OK 280 6x2) was reinforced so the fuel cylinders – six in total and each with a capacity of 200 litres - were installed on the roof. In the case of the high floor versions, the gas cylinders are installed below the floor.

* Between October 2014 and August 2015 eight demonstrations of the Scania bio methane / CNG bus were conducted with presentations for authorities, customers and representatives of public and private institutions. The vehicle was first run by Sorocaba (SP), followed by Londrina (PR), Florianópolis (SC), São José dos Campos (SP) and in São Paulo. Between June and August 2015 the vehicle was run on CNG only and on two lines of the SPTrans System covering 5,000km; the results were measured by Netz Automotive Engineering. The field tests showed the cost per km of CNG was 28% lower than that of diesel, including the consumption of Ará S2 (Ad-Blue). The vehicle was also tested with bio methane for three months – from October to November 2014, at Itaipu Binacional; during January 2015 in Rio Grande do Sul, and in March 2016 in Rio de Janeiro. No figures were given for these trials, however.

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**No buyer found yet for Busscar assets**

Brazil - The third attempted auction of Busscar Ónibus SA, which has its headquarters in Joinville, State of Santa Catarina held in early July last year and the most anticipated in recent months, again finished without an offer from a prospective buyer - the company was offered as a whole at 49% of the appraised value and then as separated business units. As a result of there being no bids, the courts now have to decide on how to move forward to sell the company’s assets and to pay creditors.

The auctioneer, Tatiane Santos Duarte, that is trying to sell Busscar has still not ruled out finding a buyer, as it is common practice for prospective buyers to wait for the price to drop further still before making an offer. Furthermore, in cases involving manufacturing operations, the process is very often very time consuming.

Also, as the bankruptcy law in Brazil states that property can only be sold by auction, the substitute judge of the 5th Civil Court in Joinville, Santín Walter Junior, must now decide on the procedures going forward for the sale of the company assets.

One of the possibilities provided by law is for closed bids to be submitted in advance, which opened on the day of the auction.

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