Mercedes-Benz Tourismo
Irish Coach of the Year 2018

REPORT: Euro Coach Test, Sweden
PROFILE: EVM Limited
NEW FLEET: Operators' Investments
CONDUCTORS' STAND: The 'B' Word

Inside:
REVIEWS
busworld.
COACH OF THE YEAR 2018 EUROPE KORTRIJK
20-25 OCT 2017

COACH BUS UK
WINNER
Irish Midi Coach of the Year 2018

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2018

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Talk with Dónal or Sandra

Dónal / M.D. PhD. Sandra / E.D. MBS

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The ‘B’ word

www.fleet.ie
GoBus.ie, which operates a non-stop motorway coach service between Galway and Dublin City and Airport, has achieved exceptional mileage on a set of Michelin X-MultiWay 3D Z tyres fitted to the drive axle on one of its Volvo 9700 coaches, reaching an impressive 542,000km.

The award-winning Galway-based company specifies Michelin tyres as original equipment across the fleet, with tyres on the drive axle typically achieving 440,000km before being replaced. However, this particular vehicle set a new fleet record, covering in excess of half a million kilometres – the equivalent of travelling around the Equator more than 13 times.

“Our coaches are on the road 365 days a year, so fitting a reputable and reliable tyre brand is key for our long distance, inter-city journeys. That’s exactly what we get from the Michelin tyres – and more!,” commented GoBus.ie’s Fleet Manager, Donal Burke.

“We had experience of a premium competitor brand coming as original equipment on some of our coaches, but they’d only manage 300,000km before wearing out. Our vehicles travel approximately 1,000km within 24 hours, so fitting Michelin tyres has proven the best option and we haven’t looked back since.”

GoBus also benefits from the reassurance of Michelin’s accidental damage guarantee, which is unique in the Irish and UK markets. Available on more than 40 different sizes and tread patterns of Michelin tyre, it covers operators against the financial costs of accidental damage suffered before a Michelin tyre is 50 percent worn, providing it has been registered on Michelin’s MyAccount web portal. “On the rare occasions that we have suffered a tyre failure, having the accidental damage guarantee meant we didn’t lose out financially, and Michelin handled the process from start to finish. The aftercare service we receive from Michelin is fantastic,” he added.

GoBus.ie specifies its Volvo 9700 coaches on 315/80 R 22.5 Michelin X MultiWay 3D Z (all-position) tyres as standard across all three axles. This ensures the maximum ride comfort for its passengers on the long journeys across Ireland.

EVM supplies £12m Sprinter School Bus order to OneBus

OneBus Limited, the not-for-profit Focus Learning Trust owned company that operates a passenger transport service for educational charities, has invested £12/€13.3 million in a new school bus fleet renewal programme. EVM Ltd., based in Kilbeggan, County Westmeath, received the substantial order to supply almost 300 Mercedes-Benz Sprinter School Bus minibuses.

Operating within the Focus Group of Schools, the service provided in Great Britain and Northern Ireland is to transport students to and from their schools and on educational trips. Employing over 600 dedicated educational professionals with almost 4000 students in the UK, OneBus Ltd maintains a network of vehicles across these areas, shuttling students to and from school and extra-curricular events.

EVM Ltd is a recognised leader in Sprinter minibus design and production. Several challenges faced the design team, from the increased weight of the Euro 6 Sprinter to the logistics of delivering a large fleet successfully to each end user in various locations throughout the UK. The new units are based on the medium wheelbase 314CDI Sprinter model with 7 G-Tronic automated transmission and also featuring in-dash and saloon air-con and heating.

In a change from the vehicles’ previous configuration, the latest models feature EVM’s bespoke three stage front entry, allowing access and egress of students to be fully monitored by the driver, thereby increasing security. 12 Executive reclining seats in leather are fitted in the saloon area, with overhead luggage racks plus a large luggage cage positioned right of the passenger entry door.

Vehicle security is enhanced further with Cat Lock and ECU Guards, while all vehicles are monitored with a state-of-the-art satellite tracking system.
During the Busworld Europe Awards Night in Kortrijk, Belgium, the Irizar i8 was honoured with the prestigious ‘Coach of the Year 2018’ title.

Coach of the Year Jury President Tom Terjesen from Norway, who presented the trophy to José Manuel Orcasitas, CEO of the Spanish manufacturer, commented: “The winner has a design that is for the future, as well as for today. It not only looks like a premium coach, it also feels like it, especially for the passengers, and also for the driver.”

“The frontal design of the Irizar i8 is ten centimetres narrower than the rest of the coach, which is unusual. That results in lower wind resistance and fuel consumption, while the integral body is built lighter without compromising safety and comfort.

“The overall winner was selected from the contenders at the Euro Coach Test held during September at Mantorp Park, Sweden. Six coaches participated and were tested by the jury consisting of 20 professional journalists from all over Europe. Iveco came to Sweden with the Evadyx, Irizar with the i8, Mercedes-Benz with the new Tourismo, and Scania with the Interlink HD, together with the VDL double decker FDD2 and the Neoplan Tourliner.

Test criteria included driveability, handling, passenger comfort, capacity, luggage space, driver’s area, visibility, drivetrain and accessibility. The six coaches were tested on a lengthy designated route by the various jury members – undertaken several times to get a good and honest comparison.

After some deliberation the jury agreed to a worthy winner, characterised by high comfort levels, luxurious interior, good working environment and high safety aspects.

See our full report from the Euro Coach Test on page 38.

Isuzu Visigo for Ireland

At Bus & Coach Shows across mainland Europe, Isuzu coaches are always prominently displayed. Through a joint venture shareholding with the Anadolu Group, production of the Japanese brand’s passenger transport vehicles is located near Kocaeli, Turkey. To date the Visigo 9.5 metre midi-coach has been specified in left-hand-drive form for sale in European markets while from 2018, right-hand-drive versions will become available for the Irish and UK markets through importers Harris Auto.

With a capacity of up to 39 seats, the Visigo with a GVW of 13.5 tonnes, is powered by a Euro 6 Cummins ISB 6.7 litre 6-cylinder diesel with 320 hp and 1,000 Nm of torque with a ZF 6-speed automatic gearbox. Currently, Harris Auto is evaluating a left-hand-drive version here in Ireland with a series of customer clinics held at its headquarters on the Naas Road in Dublin.
Twelve bus and coach operators from across Ireland were honoured at the seventh running of the Fleet Bus & Coach Awards 2018 Gala Dinner held at the Killashee Hotel, Naas on Thursday 16 November. Supported by JF Dunne Insurances, the successful event, attended by 300 delegates from the passenger transport industry acknowledged another busy tourism and commuter season and celebrated with the award winners in honouring best practice in the sector.

All of the finalists in the bus and coach operator awards section eagerly awaited the announcements from event compere Bob Conway (Today FM) and were collectively anxious to step on to the winners’ podium. Dovetailing the operator awards, ongoing developments by coachbuilders and manufacturers were acknowledged with national titles for mini, midi and full-size coaches up for grabs.

“In complimenting the victorious companies and the success of the awards event in general, Jarlath commented; “Congratulations to all of the award winners and best wishes to their businesses on the road ahead. We are delighted with the success of the staging of an evening awards event as it moved from our traditional lunchtime presentation.”

While the occasion looked to the future, the awards acknowledged a number of long established companies associated with the bus and coach industry, including marking 70 years of manufacturing at Van Hool (Belgium) with the inaugural Hall of Fame award. Other recipients of the Laurel themed stained glass picture were Butlers Bus Tours (Cork) and Donoghues of Galway both celebrating 50 years in business, with Cronin Coaches (Cork) and Kerry Coaches both passing the 60-year milestone.

Also on the night, Mrs. Denise Harris, wife of the late Pino Harris, President and CEO of the Harris Group was presented with a floral tribute for his life long contribution to the commercial industry.

Special Guest Speaker was John McGuinness TD, Chairman of the Committee on Finance Public Expenditure & Reform, with musical entertainment on the night performed by the Bentley Boys.
Everyone wants choices in life and with the Volvo B11R range that will never be a problem.

For a start, the best-selling coach chassis in the British Isles can be specified with body styles from Jonckheere, Plaxton, Sunsundegui, along with the complete 9700.

The Volvo DK11K Euro 6 engine also comes in a choice of 420 or 460hp power ratings, whilst beam or independent front suspension, varying lengths and two or three axle configurations takes versatility to a new level.

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**COACH OPERATOR OF THE YEAR 2018 – COMMUTER**

*Sponsored by The Plaza Group*

*Winner: Swords Express*

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; Henry Healy, The Plaza Group (Sponsor); Sinead Kavanagh, Swords Express and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.

**COACH OPERATOR OF THE YEAR 2018 – INTER CITY**

*Sponsored by Volvo Bus*

*Winner: Aircoach*

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; David Porter, Volvo Bus (Sponsor); Alan Parker, Aircoach and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.
Sponsored by Van Hool
Winner: Paddywagon/Elegant Irish Tours

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; Don Costello and Gabriel Finn, Paddywagon Tours/Elegant Irish Tours; Dan Peters, Van Hool (Sponsor) and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.

COACH OPERATOR OF THE YEAR 2018 – AIRPORT SERVICES

Sponsored by Corrib Oil
Winner: Airport Hopper

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; Patricia McConn, Airport Hopper; Eamon Dalton, Corrib Oil (Sponsor); David McConn, Airport Hopper and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.
**Bus Operator of the Year 2018 – Less than 10 vehicles**

**Sponsored by Lir Bus & Coach**

**Winner:** Fitzpatrick Coaches

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; Pascal Fitzpatrick, Fitzpatrick Coaches; Martin Daly, Lir Bus & Coach (Sponsor) and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.

**Bus Operator of the Year 2018 – More than 10 vehicles**

**Sponsored by Carlyle Bus & Coach**

**Winner:** Tony Doyle Coaches

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; Tony Doyle, Tony Doyle Coaches; Diarmuid Thompson, Carlyle Bus & Coach (Sponsor) and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.
SCHOOL BUS OPERATOR OF THE YEAR 2018

Sponsored by AIB Finance & Leasing
Winner: Donoghues of Galway

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; Shane McLaughlin, AIB Finance & Leasing (Sponsor); Marie Donoghue and Joe Donoghue, Donoghues of Galway and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.

BEST SAFETY PRACTICE AWARD 2018

Sponsored by Bridgestone
Winner: Wexford Bus

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; Lorene Crowley and Claire O'Rourke, Wexford Bus; Martin Somers, Bridgestone (Sponsor) and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.
The entirely new, modern and streamlined interior and exterior design of the EX reflects the characteristics of the vehicle: functional and efficient. Created with the values of the Van Hool range in mind: great reliability, combined with a high level of finishing.
Best Livery & Corporate Identity Award 2018

Sponsored by Brian Noone Ltd
Winner: Anchor Tours

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; Gerry Connor and Anthony Keenan, Anchor Tours; Mark Noone, Brian Noone Ltd (Sponsor) and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.

Care for the Environment Award 2018

Sponsored by Clarke Autowash
Winner: Matthews Coach Hire

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; Vincent Clarke, Clarke Autowash (Sponsor); Paddy Matthews, Matthews Coach Hire and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.
Sponsored by Coach Tourism & Transport Council
Winner: Cronin's Coaches

INVESTMENT IN INNOVATION AWARD 2018

Van Hool
Celebrating 70 Years in Bus/Coach Building in 2017
Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach pictured with Dan Peters, Sales Executive, Van Hool pictured at the induction of Van Hool into the Fleet Bus & Coach Hall of Fame.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION
A special presentation was made to Denise Harris, wife of the late Pino Harris, for his life long contribution to the commercial vehicle industry.
Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; Chris Haughton, Harris Auto; Ian Butler, Butlers Bus Tours and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; Chris Haughton, Harris Auto; Anne Cronin and Dermot Cronin, Cronin’s Coaches; Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances; Margaret Cronin, Niall Cronin and Derry Cronin, Cronin’s Coaches.

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; Chris Haughton, Harris Auto; Joe Donoghue, Donoghues of Galway and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; Chris Haughton, Harris Auto; Mike Buckley, Kerry Coaches; Johnny Buckley, Kerry Coaches and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.
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**Irish Mini Coach of the Year 2018**

**Sponsored by Close Brothers Commercial Finance**

**Winner: Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 516 UNVI Vega EX**

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Gavin Smith, Close Brothers Commercial Finance; Ian Dennehy, Central Bus & Coach; Sean Murtagh, Fleet Bus & Coach magazine and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.

**Irish Midi Coach of the Year 2018**

**Sponsored by Close Brothers Commercial Finance**

**Winner: Turas 600S**

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Gavin Smith, Close Brothers Commercial Finance; Mark Noone, Brian Noone Ltd; Sean Murtagh, Fleet Bus & Coach magazine and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.
**Irish Coach of the Year 2018**

**Sponsored by Close Brothers Commercial Finance**

**Winner: Turas 600S**

Pictured (l-r) Colm Devitt, JF Dunne Insurances; Gavin Smith, Close Brothers Commercial Finance; Marcus Watts, EvoBus; Sean Murtagh, Fleet Bus & Coach magazine and Phillip Kenny, JF Dunne Insurances.
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Patricia McConn, Melissa McConn - Dualway Group
Peter Farrell, Cronins Coaches; Diarmaid Thompson, Niall Nevin - Carlyle Bus & Coach Parts
Amy Pettitt, Claire O’Rourke - Wexford Bus
Hannah Murphy, Dylan Donoghue, Rachael Duggan - Donoghues Of Galway
Mary & Vincent Clarke - Clarke Auto Wash
Emma Russell, Matthew Kavanagh, Helena Kavanagh Mason - Pierce Kavanagh Coaches
Yvonne O’Carroll, Ray Murray, Tetyana Ignatenko - Galway Tour Company
John & Anne Kavanagh - Pierce Kavanagh Coaches

Shaun McBride, EvoBus UK Ltd; PJ Keoghan and Danny McGee, EVM

Deirdre Sinnott, Health & Safety Authority and Caoimhe Kavanagh, Pierce Kavanagh Coaches

Aoife Connolly, Carl & Maria White - Bus Éireann

Brendan Collins, Michelle Dillon - Collins Travel, Philip O’Callaghan - J O’Callaghan & Sons

Olajide Ogunse, Keith McDonnell and Stephen Millar

Liam Farrelly, Central Bus & Coach; Jarlath Sweeney, Fleet Bus & Coach; Ian Dennehy, Central Bus & Coach; Olajide Ogunse and Stephen Millar – Dublin Mini Coaches

Niamh Cronin, Noreen O’Neill, Leona Donoghue, Marie Donoghue, Sharon Egan

Eddie Reilly, Phyllis O’Connor, Dawn Nolan, Willie Cullen - Dualway

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All professional bus and truck drivers (those who drive for a living) must have a Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (Driver CPC).

If you held a full bus driving licence before 10th of September 2008 or a full truck driving licence before 10th September 2009 you are automatically entitled to Driver CPC.

If you’re a new bus or truck driver you’ll have to pass the Driver CPC examinations.

Important
All drivers (new and existing) are required to retain this qualification by attending one refresher training day per year in each five year period.

Bus drivers: this is the 5th and final year in the current CPC training cycle. For existing Bus Drivers complete your 5th day of CPC training before July 2018 so and receive your CPC card before 10th September.

If you drive trucks and buses you need to attend six days of refresher training in each five year period.

For more information visit www.rsa.ie
Email: cpc@rsa.ie
The ongoing buoyancy within the tourism and commuter sectors of the Irish passenger transport industry has led to operators investing in new buses and coaches to further improve the highly professional services offered to their customers.

Likewise, the bus and coach manufacturers and bodybuilders are producing high quality finished vehicles with a major focus on driver and passenger comforts, while improved fuel efficiency and lower emissions reduce operator’s carbon footprints.

Running concurrently with the 2018 Irish Coach Operator Awards, Fleet Bus & Coach Irish Coach of the Year Awards honours coach manufacturers. On this occasion there were twelve models in contention within three categories – mini, midi and full sized coaches.

Since the last awards, newcomers have entered the business with TORC Autos developing new mini and midi coaches while established brands have either modified existing models or introduced brand new versions.

In the mini-coach segment, three variants of the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter were in contention from three different coachbuilders. Built on the Sprinter S16 is the new TORC S5 which was configured in VIP specification to accommodate 19 passengers. Well known as a bus and coach operator, the O’Callaghan family in Killarney, County Kerry has ventured into the provision of a range of mini and midi coaches, built by a renowned specialist in Turkey. Customer orders are streaming in from around the country and the UK after a successful promotion at the Coach & Bus Show, at the NEC in Birmingham.

Kilbeggan, County Westmeath based EVM produces a number of mini and midi coaches from the Sprinter range, with the S19 X-Clusive presented for the two-day assessment undertaken by the expert judging panel. Powered by a 191 hp V6 with 7-speed G-Tronic automatic gearbox, this Sprinter features an electric passenger door and comes well equipped with fridge, coffee maker and numerous other fittings.

Built on the Sprinter S16 is the VEGA EX from long established coachbuilder UNVI, which has factories in Spain and Portugal. The example here was supplied by one of its Irish agents, Central Bus & Coach (Kenagh, Ballymahon, County Longford). EX stands for Extra Long as the 5.5 tonne GVW panel van body has been extended slightly to comfortably accommodate 22 leather covered passenger seats and additional luggage space. Again the 7 G-Tronic autobox is mated to the 2.1 litre Euro 6 163 hp diesel. As one would expect from the triple pointed star brand, safety equipment fitted is second to none.

Nominated in the Midi-Coach Award classification was another example from sector debutants TORC Autos. The TORC i7 can be configured with VIP seating (with tables) or with regular seat numbers and is based on the Iveco Daily 70C18 which is the 7.2 tonne, 180 hp version that can be specified with the ZF 8-speed Hi-Matic automated transmission or 6-speed manual. Both the front sector and dash area remain unchanged, with the exception of a lower spoiler fitted to the front bumper.

Brian Noone Ltd of Maynooth has been involved with the passenger transport industry for decades and in recent years has created a number of bespoke CAD designed new midi-coaches based on Iveco and Mercedes-Benz chassis and drivetrains. Upon introducing the Turas ranges, instant appeal and customer orders followed both at home and abroad. One of its latest models is the Turas 600S which has 25 seats and is based on the 70C18 Iveco Daily. This is the most popular choice for bus converters presently, especially since the demise of the Mercedes-Benz Vario. With the development of the Hi-Matic automated transmission, the 3.0 litre 180 hp drivetrain is extremely smooth and appreciated by both driver and passengers alike.
Also from the Noone stable is the Turas 900, which is a large midi-coach that is nearer to a full-size coach as up to 37 seats can be installed. Built on the Mercedes-Benz Atego 12-tonne truck chassis and powered by the OM 934 5.1 litre Euro 6 diesel, the 1021L model boasts 211 hp. With the authorisation and type approval from Mercedes-Benz’s parent, Daimler in Germany, the Noone design has resulted in the relocation of the steering column and the introduction of a bonnet with the face of the Sprinter added up to 6m³ of luggage space.

The UNVI Iveco Compa VIP was presented by Lir Bus & Coach, located in Mullingar, County Westmeath. Using an Iveco Daily 70C18H chassis and powertrain, it comes with high specification and 17 extended VIP two-tone leather seats with single and double table fitted. USB points are at each seat and with 4.85m² boot space with 680 kg, it boosts the biggest luggage area in its class. Plated at 7.2 tonnes, the 3.0 litre 4 cylinder CGT turbo charged/intercooled Euro 6 produces 180 hp and 430 Nm of torque. The Compa VIP also keeps with the Daily cab theme internally and externally.

The Higer Super 9, imported and distributed by the Harris Auto Group, slots in between a midi coach and a full size coach. Also badged KLQ6932, the Chinese brand has already made an impact in the Irish and UK markets. Fitted with 37 seats, the 13.9 tonne GVW model is powered by the Cummins ISB6.7 E5 @300 hp with Allison T325 automatic transmission which includes a 4 stage intertarder with cruise control. Air suspension is fitted all round. A 2-year bumper-to-bumper unlimited mileage warranty is available. Other big-name component suppliers include WABCO, Michelin and Spheros (Valeo). From next year the Higer range will be assembled in Dublin.

Moving up to the full-size coach category, the 12.2 metre MAN Beulas Cygnus 19.360, in Barton’s colours, was supplied by the OHM Group in Baldonnel, Dublin. Built on the MAN RR2 chassis, with MAN 360 hp Euro 6 diesel and ZF EcoLife automatic transmission, it has 55 (or 53) reclining seats, Hispacold air-con, fridge, driver’s safe and Bosch entertainment system. Among the optional extras include demountable toilet and Synectics 8-way CTTC camera.

Mercedes-Benz through EvoBus UK & Ireland premiered the newly launched Tourismo with German plates but thankfully in RHD. Powered by the Mercedes-Benz OM 470, it produces 290 kW/388 hp and the drivetrain includes PowerShift 3 8-speed auto transmission. Similarities with the award winning Actros truck range include some light fittings, the dash area and the engine efficiencies gained recently by the Daimler brand. This 51+1 seater with seat numbering unusually featured 3-pin plugs as it was a prototype version but USB can be specified. This latest Tourismo was also nominated for the European Coach of the Year Awards 2018.

Van Hool celebrates 70 years in bus/coach building and Irish dealers Cronin’s of Cork had the EX15H up for assessment at the test drives. Coming in at 12.5 metres, the 51 seater offers a much sought after combination that is Van Hool and the PACCAR, best known to us as DAF powertrain. Here the MX.11 Euro 6 is used with an output of 435 hp with maximum torque levels at 2,100 Nm. The transmission used is ZF’s 6-speed EcoLife. The Belgian manufacturer enjoys an enviable reputation for reliable, strong vehicles.

Not intentionally Volvo is at the end of this line-up, but the 9700 is well known to us and to many Irish operators. A former winner of this award, the 53/55 seat tri-axle 13m version assessed was provided by longstanding customer (and brand ambassador) Pierce Kavanagh (Urlingford, County Kilkenny). Constructed on the Volvo B11R chassis, the 9700 is a fully integral luxury coach with independent front suspension. With its rear positioned D11K engine and Volvo I-Shift automatic transmission with integral retarder, the 9700 is packed with safety features, as expected from the Swedish brand. Up to 9.0m³ luggage capacity is provided.

The announcement and presentation of these three awards were made at the Fleet Bus & Coach Awards 2018 at the Killashee Hotel, Naas, County Kildare.

See page 17 for full details.
## Mini Coach of the Year 2018 Contenders

### Make/Model

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<td>TORC S5/Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 516 CDI</td>
<td>EVMX-Clusive/Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 519</td>
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<td>Spec Check – Irish Mini-Coach of the Year 2018 Contenders</td>
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### Engine/Power

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### Transmission

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<th>Transmission</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7G-Tronic Auto</td>
<td>7 speed G-Tronic Auto</td>
<td>7 speed G-Tronic Auto</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Suspension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suspension</th>
<th>Suspension</th>
<th>Suspension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard springs</td>
<td>Standard springs</td>
<td>Standard springs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Brakes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brakes</th>
<th>Brakes</th>
<th>Brakes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discs</td>
<td>Discs</td>
<td>Discs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### GVW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GVW</th>
<th>GVW</th>
<th>GVW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.5 tones</td>
<td>5.0 tonnes</td>
<td>5.5 tonnes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Dimensions: Length:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions: Length:</th>
<th>Dimensions: Length:</th>
<th>Dimensions: Length:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8,000 mm</td>
<td>7,345 mm</td>
<td>7,545 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,200 mm</td>
<td>1,990 mm</td>
<td>1,993 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,980 mm</td>
<td>2,800 mm</td>
<td>2,800 mm</td>
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</table>

### Dimensions: Width:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions: Width:</th>
<th>Dimensions: Width:</th>
<th>Dimensions: Width:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2.2 m³</td>
<td>0.97 m³</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Dimensions: Height:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions: Height:</th>
<th>Dimensions: Height:</th>
<th>Dimensions: Height:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>350 kg</td>
<td>223 kg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Seating Capacity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seating Capacity</th>
<th>Seating Capacity</th>
<th>Seating Capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19+</td>
<td>15+</td>
<td>22+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Spec Check – Irish Midi-Coach of the Year 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Make/Model</th>
<th>Torc i7/Iveco Daily 70C18 VIP</th>
<th>Noone Turas 600S/Iveco Daily 70C18</th>
<th>Noone Turas 900/Mercedes-Benz Atego 1021L</th>
<th>UNVI Compa VIP/Iveco Daily 70C18H</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engine/Power</td>
<td>3.0 litre/180 hp</td>
<td>3.0 litre/180 hp</td>
<td>3.132 litre/211 hp</td>
<td>3.0 litre/180 hp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torque</td>
<td>850Nm @ 2200 rpm</td>
<td>430Nm @ ??</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension</td>
<td>Front Independent springs/Rear Air Suspension</td>
<td>Front independent/Rear springs</td>
<td>Standard springs</td>
<td>Standard springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brakes</td>
<td>Discs</td>
<td>Discs</td>
<td>Discs</td>
<td>Discs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GVW</td>
<td>7.2 tonnes</td>
<td>7.2 tonnes</td>
<td>12 tonnes GVW</td>
<td>7.2 tonnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimensions: Length</td>
<td>8,498mm</td>
<td>8,050 mm</td>
<td>9,590 mm</td>
<td>8,498 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Width</td>
<td>2,420mm</td>
<td>2,393 mm</td>
<td>2,400 mm</td>
<td>2,420 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>3,050mm</td>
<td>3,050 mm</td>
<td>3,195 mm</td>
<td>3,050 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luggage Volume</td>
<td>4.5m³</td>
<td>4.3m³</td>
<td>6m³</td>
<td>4.85m³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luggage Weight Allowance</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>680 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seating Capacity</td>
<td>17+1 (28 max)</td>
<td>14+1 (25)</td>
<td>37+</td>
<td>17+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coach of the Year 2018

Contenders

Spec Check – Irish Coach of the Year 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Make/Model</th>
<th>Higer Super 9 (KLQ6932)</th>
<th>MAN Beulas Cygnus 19.360</th>
<th>Mercedes-Benz Tourismo</th>
<th>Van Hool EX15H</th>
<th>Volvo 9700/B11R 3-axle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engine/Power</td>
<td>Cummins ISB 6.7 litre Euro 5/300 hp</td>
<td>MAN 10.5 litre / 360 hp 10.7 litre / 395 hp</td>
<td>PACCAR MX11/ 435 hp Volvo D11K 430 hp</td>
<td>8-speed PowerShift 3 ZF 6-speed EcoLife</td>
<td>Volvo I-Shift auto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torque</td>
<td>1,100Nm</td>
<td>1,800Nm</td>
<td>1,900Nm</td>
<td>2,100Nm</td>
<td>2,100Nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmission</td>
<td>Allison T325R Auto ZF 6-speed EcoLife</td>
<td>8-speed PowerShift 3 ZF 6-speed EcoLife</td>
<td>8-speed PowerShift 3 ZF 6-speed EcoLife</td>
<td>8-speed PowerShift 3 ZF 6-speed EcoLife</td>
<td>8-speed PowerShift 3 ZF 6-speed EcoLife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension</td>
<td>Air/6 bags/Independent front</td>
<td>Independent front/ Full air</td>
<td>Front Independent/Air Independent front/ Full air</td>
<td>Independent front/ Full air</td>
<td>Independent Front/Full air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brakes</td>
<td>Discs</td>
<td>Discs</td>
<td>Discs</td>
<td>Discs</td>
<td>Discs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GVW</td>
<td>13.9 tonnes</td>
<td>19.5 tonnes</td>
<td>18 tonnes</td>
<td>19 tonnes</td>
<td>26 tonnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimensions: Length:</td>
<td>9,338 mm</td>
<td>1,220 mm</td>
<td>12.30 mm</td>
<td>1,248 mm</td>
<td>1,300 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Width:</td>
<td>2,470 mm</td>
<td>2,550 mm</td>
<td>2,550 mm</td>
<td>2,550 mm</td>
<td>2,550 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height:</td>
<td>3,376 mm</td>
<td>3,425 mm</td>
<td>3,620 mm</td>
<td>3,805 mm</td>
<td>3,750 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luggage Volume</td>
<td>6.7 m³</td>
<td>8.8 m³</td>
<td>9.6 m³</td>
<td>6.8 m³</td>
<td>9.0 m³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luggage Weight</td>
<td>590 kg</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1310 kg</td>
<td>1250 kg</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seating Capacity</td>
<td>37+</td>
<td>$3/$55</td>
<td>$3</td>
<td>$1+</td>
<td>$3/$55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Did you know that there is an Irish based bus conversion specialist that exports 95% of what it produces? Since 2010 EVM Ltd, established by Danny McGee in late 2009, has made great strides with a range of Mercedes-Benz Sprinter-based mini-buses and mini-coaches. By the end of 2017, over 350 units will have passed out the side door at EVMs’ 40,000 sq ft factory located in Kilbeggan, County Westmeath.

Although probably best known in the UK market, the ‘E’ in EVM stands for ‘Europe’ and seven years after its launch that element is now coming true, as the Midlands company continues to progress and expand into new markets. Its range of well kitted out and finished Sprinter people carriers have in recent years made an impact in northern Europe (mainly Belgium, Finland, Norway and Sweden) and in as far away places as Australia, India and New Zealand. Left hand drive production began in 2011.

Recently the office block part of the facility (situated to the rear of the famous Lockes Distillery) has been revamped to accommodate additional administration staff. Presently there are 45 members of staff, the majority of who are involved in the workshop.

This element of the workforce is under the watchful eyes of Ivor Jones who has decades of vehicle production experience. When recruiting floor staff, Ivor looks to tradesmen; “people good with their hands, joiners, kitchen fitters,” he said. In-house training is provided over a number of months. Currently there is an equal mix of east European and local employees. “Gates open at 6:00am and close at 5:00pm so there are plenty of hours to work and get paid accordingly,” he stressed.

Regarding product EVM has developed at least eight bus/coach conversions from the standard Mercedes-Benz Sprinter glazed van. 90% of production/sales come from the 516 models with the highly rated 7-speed G-Tronic automated transmission. Low floor and mobility applications have become a specialty at EVM. Most of the components and parts are either supplied locally or fabricated in-house. Other major suppliers are global producers of air-con, heating and electric doors, etc. “It’s all about efficiencies, having the right parts available and to hand, in order to proceed with a speedy reliable production system.” When the customer’s order is complete and following an extensive consultation procedure, the finished vehicle is then quality controlled before delivery, enabling EVM to match the manufacturer’s warranty of 3 years unlimited mileage.

EVM’s attention to detail and dedication in turning out a quality product every time is noticeable and noteworthy. Safety is important too as Danny emphasised. “EVM was the first vehicle converter to develop and homologate a Mercedes-Benz Sprinter van conversion mini-bus with Roll Over protection,” he said.

Danny McGee has been involved with the light commercial vehicle conversion sector since 1992, though his company KVC Ltd, based at the same location. He is looking forward to the arrival of the new generation Sprinter and how he can create his own design mark on the new product when it arrives late 2018.

With full European Whole Vehicle Type approval, EVM’s range caters for basic people carriers to luxury mini coaches. 260 school bus spec Trend models have been ordered by a Plymouth-based operator Onebus Ltd. Also from its West Sussex located UK sales division, strong relationships have been built up with big names in the business such as Arriva Plc, Dawson Bus & Coach Ltd, Avis Budget UK Ltd and Menzies Aviation to name a few.

EVM has Europe and beyond in its sights
New Volvo coaches enter service in Kerry, Kilkenny, Cork, Wicklow & Donegal

Killarney, County Kerry based Deros Coach Tours, recently took delivery of a new Volvo B11R with Jonckheere JHV2 bodywork, one of the first to enter service in Ireland.

The South-west company made the decision to purchase the 12.6m, 430hp powered vehicle with I-Shift transmission, after it was showcased on the Volvo Bus stand at last year’s Euro Bus Expo (EBE) in Birmingham.

“Following our visit to EBE last November, we set our sights on purchasing a new Volvo B11R featuring the new JHV2 bodywork, which we believe is the first to enter service in Ireland,” explained Denis Spillane, Transport Manager for Deros Coach Tours.

“We know that the B11R chassis will give us the operational performance, fuel economy and reliability we require, and we particularly liked the look of the new JHV2 bodywork with its stylish appearance and improved features and benefits. For example, the interior of the coach is extremely spacious, ensuring a comfortable ride for our passengers.

The new JHV2 body was launched in late 2016 and provides stylist design with an impressive aesthetic appearance and comfortable journey. The popularity of the Volvo B11R chassis with its highly efficient Euro 6 engine continues to be strong with coach operators in the UK and Ireland.

Bernard Kavanagh & Sons, Urlingford, County Kilkenny has added three new Volvo coaches to its 60+ strong fleet, the majority of which are examples from the Swedish marque. This latest order is comprised of two D11K 430hp B11R integral Volvo 9700s, one being 13m in length and one 13.8m, and one Volvo B8R featuring Sunsundegui SC5 bodywork. All three coaches feature Volvo’s I-Shift automated gearbox.

“With five Volvo 9700s earlier this year and we have found the operational performance and reliability of the B11R chassis to be excellent, having noticed a significant improvement on our fuel consumption rates. It not only meets, but exceeds our requirements, which is why we had no hesitation in going for Volvo again when we decided we needed additional coaches for our busy fleet,” stated Bernard Kavanagh, co-owner of Bernard Kavanagh & Sons.

“The smaller Volvo B8R Euro 6 chassis combined with the SC5 bodywork also provides excellent fuel efficiency with versatile operation and a stylish appearance. As the vehicle is slightly smaller, it makes it easier to navigate on narrower routes found on rural roads and in city centres.

From Kilbrittain, County Cork, O’Connor Coaches has welcomed a new 12.6m 53-seat 430hp Volvo B11R 9700, following an order for a coach of the same specification last year.

Company owner Brian O’Donnell said: “My father ordered our first Volvo coach in 1992 and as a result of our positive experiences, we have only used Volvo with various body combinations ever since. The Volvo B11R 9700 is a high-quality coach and in my opinion, it is in a class of its own, so it was an easy decision to select this vehicle.

Another prominent operator, Tony Doyle Coach Hire of Kilpedder, County Wicklow, has put into service a new Volvo B8R SC5 with Sunsundegui bodywork. The 10.3m coach, which joins a 30-strong line-up, is powered by the Volvo Group’s 7.7 litre 350hp Euro 6, producing 1,400Nm with I-Shift transmission.

Tony Doyle Jr, Owner & Director of Tony Doyle Coach Hire, said: “As members of the Coach Tourism & Transport Council of Ireland (CTTC) it is important that all of our coaches go above and beyond the standards that are required by clients, and our new Volvo B8R provides this. We’ve been purchasing Volvo vehicles for a number of years now and in fact took delivery of the first Volvo B11R SC7 coach to enter service in the UK and Ireland. We particularly like the smart and modern look of the Sunsundegui bodywork and this, along with the operational benefits of the B8R chassis, made our decision to go for Volvo an easy one.”

Donegal’s Bus Feda enters its 25th year of purchasing Volvos with a new integral 55-seat 430hp B11R 9700, following an order for a coach of the same specification last year.

Text & Photo: Jarlath Sweeney - editor@fleet.ie
At the launch of the new Mercedes-Benz Tourismo, the Head of Daimler Buses, Hartmut Schick stated: “The Mercedes-Benz Tourismo is the most successful European touring coach of all time, and a key driver for the success of Daimler Buses.”

Mr. Schick’s statement was certainly dramatic if nothing else. However bold the claims may be, they are true. Since it was first launched the Tourismo (High Deck Touring Coach) has been a highly important vehicle in the Mercedes-Benz Bus and Coach portfolio. Since its introduction more than 26,000 units have been sold, which must count as successful by any measure. To ensure the continued success of any vehicle it requires continuous development, and that requires investment. In the case of the new Tourismo the financial outlay came to a tidy €400 million, which of course gives rise to the question – what did Daimler get for the investment in the new Mercedes-Benz product, and will it return the investment?

The first aspect to draw comment on is the overall appearance of the new Tourismo and on this point opinions are a little divided. Some would have preferred, and expected, a more radical departure from the previous model. Although in reality it is a significant risk for any manufacturer to move too far from what has previously worked. The updated front profile is attractive and does breathe new life to the coach, without suddenly rendering the outgoing model obsolete. The design is what Mercedes-Benz describes as timeless, and brings with it improved aerodynamics which are said to ensure a reduction in fuel consumption. It is never easy to please everyone, and some are of the opinion that the rear profile would benefit from having the balanced appearance of two louvered panels rather than the asymmetric design chosen. It is a clever method of distinguishing the new model without shouting it from the rooftops. Certainly, on approach the prominently positioned three pointed star draws the eye and this is what passengers will recognise and remember.

What is recognised by operators, and arguably is the principle attribute of Tourismo is the coach’s versatility and flexibility. The idea of flexibility was no doubt in the mind of Mercedes-Benz designers when creating the new Tourismo, as Mr. Schick said: “The new Mercedes-Benz is a genuine all-rounder. Whether as a shuttle bus, charter or long-distance bus, it offers our customers an even wider range of applications than before.”

This description should win favour with Irish operators who have to ensure their vehicles can be all things to all customers, from the regular local community transport to the full national or international tour.

Tourismo is available in four variants with two or three axle configurations and lengths between 12.3 and 13.9m. Seating and luggage capacity can range up to 60 passengers and 12.1m³ on the 13.9m Tourismo L. Drivetrain options for Tourismo may vary widely amongst operators especially in Ireland.

There are two main engine options, the OM 936 and the OM 470. Both are rear mounted in-line six-cylinder Mercedes-Benz Euro 6 BlueTec units, with displacements of 7.7 and 10.7 litres respectively. The OM 936 delivers an impressive 1,400 Nm of torque between 1,200 - 1,600 rpm from the 260 kW (354hp) rated engine. The larger OM 470 can offer either 1,700 or 1,900 Nm at 1,100 rpm from outputs of 265 kW or 290 kW (355 or 389hp). In addition to these engines being regarded as the standard power choices, Mercedes-Benz has also added a range topping 335 kW (456 hp) version of the OM 470 to the catalogue. The choice for Irish operators will very much depend on the nature of the work, and the important possible residual values.

It is easy now to recognise that much of the switchgear and components are from other vehicles within the Daimler family. This policy can deliver benefits for all, as commonality of components reduces costs and increases availability. In Tourismo, parts can be found in other Daimler Bus models as well as from the Actros and Arocs truck range. Nevertheless,
these internal fixtures and fittings on the new Tourismo are first class, and the coach continues to deliver the sense of quality expected from the German manufacturer.

This sense of quality extends to all aspects of the passenger vehicle. From the wide and easily accessible entrance, through to the Mercedes-Benz branded Soft line seating and trim, it continues with other innovative touches such as the handrail running alongside the overhead luggage rack.

The driver’s area is offered in two styles, Basic Plus, and Comfort Plus. On the test drive was the Comfort Plus where we found the design and finish delivers an assured sense of quality and strength. Placement of switchgear is logical and well thought-out. However, if the driver wishes to change the layout, this can be easily arranged as all the switch locations are interchangeable. The binnacle and TFT (Thin Film Transistor) gives a better image than a Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) although at an increased cost) displays are easy to read and comprehensive. While it may take any driver unfamiliar with the Mercedes-Benz onboard display a few minutes to get the best from the system and the multi-function steering wheel, this is time well spent. The driver is well catered for with useful storage spaces, good power connections and a 67 litre fridge, and the quality of the driver’s seat ensures a first class driving position which includes well placed mirrors to enhance all round visibility.

First impressions on moving from parked is that the steering on Tourismo seems quite heavy. However, this feeling quickly fades as the feedback changes to feel more assured and positive rather than heavy. Also noticeable from the first movement is the quiet and smooth acceleration from the 290 kW (389hp) OM 470 fitted to the test unit. The standard 8-speed PowerShift3 transmission has been well matched to the 10.7 litre and transfers the 1,900 Nm of torque seamlessly to the road wheels. The coach handles well and while it feels solid it is by no means hard. Also on the road, Tourismo is noticeably quiet and comfortable at all points along the spacious interior.

While the 7.7 litre OM 936 will offer a weight advantage and will no doubt suit many operations, we felt that the OM 470 at either 360 or 389hp will be the operator and driver’s preferred choice. In addition, as Mercedes-Benz is now offering Predictive Powertrain Control (PPC) on Tourismo, the larger engine will allow PPC to achieve its full potential and deliver the impressive results, as it has for other Mercedes-Benz models. PPC has in a reasonably short time become a standard for Mercedes-Benz vehicles, as have other active and passive systems especially in the area of road safety. Notably amongst these systems are the Lane Departure Warning and Active Brake Assist 3 which is offered as standard well ahead of impending regulations, and here it’s also worth mentioning the powerful five stage retarder.

Since its official launch at Busworld the new Tourismo has been driven by the Fleet Bus & Coach team on a number of occasions, and we were fortunate to experience the coach from the passenger’s viewpoint on a recent airport transfer. All of these examples were test versions as full production only began in late summer 2017, and indications are that demand is high. Mercedes-Benz has benefited enormously from the €400 million investment in the new Tourismo which is set to deliver a significant return for parent company, Daimler AG. The new coach could also provide a significant return for operators’ investments too.

*At the recent Fleet Bus & Coach Awards, the new Mercedes-Benz Tourismo was presented with the Irish Coach of the Year 2018 Award.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spec Check</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make/Model</td>
<td>Mercedes-Benz Tourismo 15 (RHD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodywork / Seats</td>
<td>51+1 Softline Seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engine / Mounting / Euro</td>
<td>Mercedes-Benz OM470 / Rear Mounted / Euro 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cylinders / Displacement</td>
<td>In-Line six / 10.7 Litres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power / Torque</td>
<td>290 kW (389 hp) / 1900 Nm @11000 rpm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmission / Final Drive</td>
<td>MB GO250 8-Speed PowerShift Automated / 3.583:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension</td>
<td>Front &amp; Rear Roll Bars, Independent Air Suspension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braking &amp; Safety</td>
<td>Discs All Round, ESP, ASR, TPMS, 5-Stage Retarder, LDW, ACC, ABA3, Attention Assist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimensions L-W-H-WB</td>
<td>12295 - 2530 – 3645 – 6090 (mm) (H incl’s A/C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luggage Capacity</td>
<td>9.9 M³ (-1.2 M³ Toilet / -1.6 M³ Driver’s Bunk)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel Tank / Ad Blue</td>
<td>480 / 40 Litres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheels &amp; Tyres</td>
<td>Aluminium Rims – Continental 295/80 R 22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Additional Features</td>
<td>Cornering Lights, Headlamp Washers, Stop &amp; Go, Driver’s Bunk, Centre Toilet, 3 pin sockets &amp; Inverter. Handrail on Luggage Rack.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Having been staged in the coastal city of Kortrijk in Belgium for almost fifty years on a bi-annual basis, Busworld is moving to Brussels for 2019. It will now be referred to as Busworld Europe. This year 30,000 people passed through the exhibition centre. Two things were noticeable over the days we attended. Firstly there was little or no talk of Brexit, and secondly, there was a significant Irish presence, with Brian Noone Ltd., EVM and TORC Autos exhibiting.

The latter are success stories that often go unnoticed. That Irish bus producers can compete with the best in Europe is a positive reflection of the industry in Ireland and should be a source of pride for those of us associated with the sector. Irish based companies can compete with the best and have achieved a lot to date.

On the former point though, it is an issue that Europeans are not as concerned about Brexit as we would hope and sometimes think. The longer this goes on the more it will become an Irish Problem. Let’s hope not.

Busworld Kortrijk in numbers:

- 376 exhibitors from 33 countries
- 30,000 visitors from 115 countries
- 24 bus/coach exhibitions have been held at Kortrijk
- 70 companies were on the waiting list for space at the show
- 311 coaches on exhibit inside and at the outside display area

ADL
Despite the double-decker London Red Bus being regarded world-wide as an iconic product, generally people in mainland Europe regard double-deckers as a British thing. However representatives at Alexander Dennis are confident that the move towards double deckers is a trend that will continue. As the market leader in the UK, ADL obviously knows a thing or two about building double-deckers. Currently it estimates there are 15,000 units in service.

BYD
BYD - Build Your Dreams, always states that it is a battery manufacturer that became a bus manufacturer, and estimates that this expertise gives it a big advantage over its competitors. The Chinese company has recently opened a plant in Hungary. Although only established in 2007 BYD is active on all continents and has 27,000 buses in operation, covering a cumulative 8 million kilometres daily.
Cummins
As an engine manufacturer Cummins has a definite interest in the electrification of truck and bus traction. Currently it has 25 percent of the European market and as much as 90% in North America. Worldwide it estimates that there are 60,000 engines bearing the brand’s distinctive red colour in service. Looking to the future Cummins expects to be in battery production by 2019. It regards 2020 as the year that will be marked as the one when electric power arrived. It is coming to the process with an open mind in terms of propulsion and charging, and regards the upcoming challenges as an opportunity. An electrified powertrain was launched at the Show.

Daimler
While the main focus on the Daimler stand was the new Mercedes-Benz Tourismo coach, the brand was also keen to promote the Citaro hybrid, which is 8.5% more fuel efficient. Although not now available in RHD, the latest Serta coaches were on display. Production of the new Tourismo - which has just been awarded Irish Coach of the Year 2018 - has started, and deliveries will commence in January, including RHD versions.

Higer
Another Chinese manufacturer, Higer recently appointed the Harris Group as sales agents in Ireland and the UK. With some of the Higer product already touring around the Irish countryside, plans are well advanced to introduce new products during 2018. At the moment the Higer Super 9 is proving popular in the marketplace. Fitted with a Cummins 300hp diesel engine and an Allison automatic transmission, it can be supplied with up to 37 seats.

IRIZAR
The excitement and delight of the management and staff at the IRIZAR stand on receiving the ICOY (International Coach of the Year) 2018 trophy had to be seen to be believed. An explosion of Spanish emotion is an understatement. The IRIZAR group took on two onerous projects simultaneously, with the development of an integral coach and the development of an electric city bus. The Spanish company has now delivered over 1,000 integral coaches and is producing 1,000 electric city buses yearly, plenty good reason to be emotional.

MAN
Always a popular product in Ireland as both a chassis and fully built coach supplier, MAN offers many choices, including hybrid, CNG and of course, pure electric. Although not currently available in RHD, the MAN Lions’ City bus has a coach option and is a versatile vehicle. Launched in Kortrijk, it now offers fuel reduction of up to 12%. Because of some changes in weight laws, the wheelchair lift has been moved to the front, which is a much better option. Pictured is the Tourliner, an example from MAN’s Neoplan flagship coach brand.

Scania
Scania cannot be accused of being focused on one particular type of propulsion. In taking a more global view, it will develop products propelled by whatever fuel an operator opts for, or which meets whatever restrictions are put in place by Local Authorities or City Councils. Currently, 72% of people live in an urban area, a figure that will rise, putting more pressure on public transport, as people will travel less by car. Introduced was a new maintenance package, called Scania Fleet Care. This product effectively gives operators a guarantee against breakdowns.
Temsa
Temsa continues to strengthen its presence in Europe. In its native Turkey a 30 percent of the passenger transport market has been captured, and in the past twelve months it has increased its numbers in Europe by 50%. Two models were launched at the Belgian event, a new version of the MD9 Coach and a new entrant to the Midi-Bus sector.

VanHool
Celebrating its 70th anniversary in business this year VanHool, had a particularly Irish flavour to its exhibition. Lord Mayor of Belfast, Ms. Nuala Mc Allister was there to receive the first tram for the new Glider transport network in the Northern Ireland capital. This Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system will link east and west Belfast will commence in September 2019, with the Belgian coachbuilder supplying 30 diesel hybrids for the project.

VDL
VDL employs 16,000 people at its various manufacturing facilities. Last year the Dutch brand saw an increase in market share across all sectors. In introducing the Futura double decker coach, the company sees a renewed interest in operators buying these vehicles for both long distance and commuter travel. Aiming to be the market leader in e-mobility across Europe, VDL is involved in a number of projects where the full package is provided in terms of the bus, the battery, charging system and maintenance.

Volvo
With 3000 electric buses already in service, Volvo’s Electric programme is well underway. Launched here was the new 7900 Electric, with the Swedish brand claiming that the range distance has improved by up to three-fold of that previously achieved. An area that it is keen to develop is the use of autonomous driving in the confines of a depot. A rollout of such operations on public roads could, however, be fraught with difficulties.

Yutong
Chinese manufacturer Yutong produced one of the biggest highlights of the show, showcasing an electric coach, one of twelve to be delivered to a Parisian operator. With a range of 275km, it is certainly a sign of things to come. The Chinese brand claims to have 26,000 electric buses in operation currently, and has electric buses in 15 French cities. It plans to expand to a number of other European cities in the next two years.

ZF
A global leader in driveline and chassis technology, ZF is now to the forefront in the development of electrically powered vehicles. Its latest product is Ce Trax, a central drive unit. It was originally launched in 2016 and is now available for low or midi-floor vehicles. One aspect of Ce Trax and is its smooth acceleration, improving the quality and comfort of the journey for passengers.
J.F.Dunne Insurances Ltd is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. J.F.Dunne Insurances Ltd is part of the J.F.Dunne Group. The J.F.Dunne Insurances Bus & Coach Programme is offered on a tied agency basis with AIG Europe Ltd.
It might be the ease of travel to Birmingham’s NEC that makes the pilgrimage to the bi-annual Coach & Bus Show so attractive to the Irish coach industry. It could also be the impressive number of Irish vehicles, products, services and technology gathered in one place that attracts visitors over from these shores. Whatever the reason, all visitors to the two-day event were treated to a top quality show, which promoted the best of what the passenger transport industry has to offer.

The show attracted almost 6,000 visitors to view the indoor and outdoor displays and to discuss products with the exhibitors. The show is also a great opportunity to network and gauge the current health of the industry from a number of different aspects. Speaking with people at the event, there was a positive vibe to the show with many looking to replace or upgrade their vehicles.

Hybrid and electric vehicles are topical, and up for consideration, though it would appear to remain solely a topic for discussion for the vast majority of operators.

Over the two days a number of discussion groups, lectures, and workshops were held in an area designated as ‘The Theatre’ sponsored by telematics specialist Smart Drive. It was interesting to note the high level of attendance for all these meetings, which covered a vast range of topics and provided some valuable insights into issues affecting the passenger transport industry.

Speaking about Coach & Bus 2017, Event Director Helen Conway said: “The support for the show was incredible based on the reaction from our industry, Coach & Bus UK was one of our best editions to date.”

Noones - Whether one measures an exhibit by the number of vehicles on display or by floor space, the Noone (Maynooth) stand at Birmingham was arguably the largest presentation of the event. The family run business had impressive indoor and outdoor exhibits of its latest model range with a special focus on the award winning Turas 600 and 900 models.

LDV - Taking a high profile spot in the outside display area, LDV was on stand with two passenger versions of the LDV V80 minibus, called the Mini B. With high standard specifications, the units drew a lot of enquiries from visitors. Certainly, one of the attractive features from the Chinese built light commercial range is the 5 year warranty.

Volvo Sunsundegui - The popular combination of Volvo and Sunsundegui was to be found in the outdoor display area. The 10.3 metre SC5 model, available with 38/41 seats, and powered by the Volvo’s driveline, together with the Swedish brand’s renowned I-Shift transmission has gained in popularity with a wide variety of customers.

Plaxton - One of the great names in the bus and coach industry, Plaxton was out in force at Birmingham. The Scarborough based company had high profile indoor and outdoor displays. Inside, visitors could view a 53 seat 12.8m two-axle version. However, at the outside display the company showcased a new 14-metre tri-axle Panther with Volvo’s B11R driveline.
Harris Higer - Another model that drew a large and interested gathering was the Higer Super 9. This event was a highly successful one for the Harris Group brand. It would appear the 37/41 seat 6.9 metre coach is set to become an overnight success. Operators are particularly attracted by the Super 9’s flexibility, and powerful 6.7 litre 290hp Cummins ISB engine.

Mercedes-Benz - It was hard to miss the latest generation Mercedes-Benz Tourismo as it was positioned centre-stage of the EvoBus stand situated directly at the main hall’s entrance, and boasted vibrant Viper Green livery. Using shared driveline and components from the Daimler family, this Tourismo 15 RHD comes with seating capacity of 51+1 – and of course, it is available in other colours.

EVM - Kilbeggan, County Westmeath headquartered EVM attended with a selection of pristine bespoke examples of coach conversions, based on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis. The company, with a sales base in West Sussex, has created a name for painstaking attention to detail in producing specialised vehicles to meet customers’ exact requirements.

Volvo Bus - Gleaming in the bright lights of the NEC was the new Volvo B11R sporting impressive Plaxton Elite-1 bodywork. It came complete with a bespoke interior and was destined for Acklam’s Coaches (Beverley). This latest delivery is highly significant as it celebrates the 35-year partnership between Volvo and Plaxton.

Van Hool - The Belgian company was demonstrating a very attractive blue and white livery to celebrate its 70th anniversary. The increasingly popular TX16 Acron 57 seat, 13.2 metre tri-axle coach, powered by a 13 litre PACCAR (DAF) MX 13 which delivers 462 hp and was matched to a ZF AS-Tronic transmission, was indeed prominent.

Pelican Bus & Coach - Pelican Bus & Coach exhibited five vehicles including models from the Chinese Yutong and LDV brands. Pelican’s LDV 80 was converted to a very high specification by the Excel Conversions company. Another noteworthy model was the 100% full electric Yutong E12 which has been undergoing trials with operators this year.

Tranzaura - The successful award-winning telematics company with Limerick origins continues to achieve sales growth for its services to operators across all aspects of the transport industry. One could not help but notice the prominently displayed Fleet Transport Award winning logo, for its KATE system.

Freight Transport Association - The trade association assisted operators with queries and provided information on current and future legislation. For Irish attendees there was an opportunity to talk with FTA (Ireland’s) technical expert, Gary Green who was on hand to discuss topics of concern and interest.
L

inkoping is a small city in Central Sweden which is home to motorsport in the country. Judging and testing for the International Coach of the Year (ICOY) Award 2018 competition took place in Mantorp Park Racing Circuit. Six coaches were in contention for the coveted title, namely the Irizar i8, Iveco Evadys, Mercedes-Benz Tourismo, Neoplan Tourliner, Scania Interlink HD and VDL Futura (Double Decker).

Each luxury passenger carrier was thoroughly assessed by the expert international jury panel including Irish jury member Sean Murtagh. Among the measurement criteria were items such as Total Cost of Operation, driver and passenger comfort and safety, to mention a few.

As featured in our news section story on page 5, only one brand got the ‘Golden Ticket’, with the main prize presented to the Irizar i8 at the 24th edition of Busworld Europe, at Kortrijk, Belgium. Before that though there was the important business of testing and assessing the contenders in Sweden. In alphabetical order, details of the nominees are as follows:
Iveco Evadys

Iveco as a commercial vehicle brand has always been well recognised and received in Ireland. However, through its passenger transport division, formerly known as Irisbus, the Iveco Bus Evadys coach is not available in right hand drive (RHD) form. Upon asking senior management at the presentation if this would change, the ‘yes’ answer, alas, was less than convincing! Powered by the FPT Cursor 9 400hp engine and matched to a ZF TraXon automated transmission, the combination worked well, although at times the acceleration seemed sluggish. That said, gear changing was very smooth. Visibility is excellent for the driver, and the glass panel at the bottom of the main passenger door improves vision significantly and helps to protect the vulnerable road user.

From a passenger’s point of view access is easy as both the front and middle doors are wide. As with many similar sized coaches in the marketplace, the centre steps are a little steep. Low windows give good views and with USB points available for all seats, it is easy to stay connected.

Irizar i8

Irizar i8 is built using stainless steel as standard, in continuation of the Spanish coachbuilder’s policy to develop its own integral brand of coach. Clearly the i8 is targeted at the top end of the coach market. So far 1000 units have been delivered, of which 200 have been in Europe, including the UK. As the floor is completely flat, this gives a lot of options for the seat layout, including 2+1. At 14m this is the longest variant available. Maximum seating is 56 recliners, which we discovered to be extremely comfortable.

Driving the coach was a pleasure. The design of the A pillar improves visibility, while its wiper system sweeps broadly across the large windscreen. Its steering proved positive on the road as well as being impressively manoeuvrable due to its tight turning circle. USB connections were provided at all seats while the overhead locker space was enclosed for extra security. The interior is bright and the line lighting subtle but adequate. Space around the entrance door is well designed, as is the area for the tour guide which is both practical and functional. We noticed that the coach’s aerodynamic exterior styling ensures that road spray is limited and fuel efficiency maximised through lessened wind drag. Powered by the PACCAR (DAF) MX13-378 with the ZF AS-Tronic auto box, on the drive to Sweden from Spain (unladen) the coach achieved almost 12mpg, while operators have reported that they can achieve almost 11mpg in general service. Retail price of the Irizar i8 coach as tested is €390,000.
Neoplan Tourliner
Launched at the IAA CV Show, in Hannover, Germany last year, almost 400 MAN Neoplan Tourliners are in service and available in many variants. With a significant aerodynamic improvement, fuel consumption has been reduced by 10%. Certain features about the Tourliner stand out, notably the interior design which is pristine, almost clinical, but still managing to give a warm feeling. A wide variety of seat layouts are available including the 2+1 luxury configuration. All of these luxury coaches are manufactured in Turkey, but if extra fitting is required in terms of specialisation, it is done at the Plauen plant in Germany. This could be a custom designed kitchen or extra conference area.

For the driver the clinical theme continues, as the information cluster is clear and easy to read, and the driver's seat and steering column will facilitate any size or shape of driver. A well-designed front door area ensures safe entry and exit, while the positioning of the A pillar provides excellent visibility. For passengers, access through to the aisle is spacious and once seated there is plenty of headroom. However, the compromise here is that people of smaller stature will struggle to reach the individual lighting and call bell from their sitting position. All seats have USB connections. For wheelchair users the lift is positioned over the front axle.

On the road the coach drives well, with the engine brake retarder particularly smooth. Although the steering is sensitive, the more one drives it, the more the driver can become used to it. Acceleration is sharp and the crawling feature in traffic makes driving less stressful. The Neoplan Tourliner is powered by a combination of the MAN- D2676LOH35 Euro 6 engine and ZF Tip-Matic automated box. Price as tested is €265,000.

Mercedes-Benz Tourismo
The arrival of a new Tourismo from Mercedes-Benz was much anticipated in the marketplace leading up to its launch in Brussels earlier this year. Ready for customer deliveries from next January in both LHD & RHD forms, the all-new Tourismo has hit the ground running. Expect to see many variants of the new coach in Ireland soon. A substantial list of optional extras are available upon ordering to suit the type of service offered by the coach operator.

Weighing in at 200kg less than its predecessor, when developing the new Tourismo the designers were conscious that most operators did not want a revolutionary new coach design that might date the outgoing model. While it bears a strong resemblance to its predecessor, there are some subtle design differences and improvements. A more rounded windscreen gives better view, with less blind spots. When in cruise mode the overall height of the coach reduces, making it even more sleek in the wind. Available in sizes from 12.2m to 13.9m in two and three-axle configurations, a new engine option is now available. Slightly lower rated, the 7.7 litre OM936 is likely to only be fitted in 10% of all new units sold, probably only suited for shuttle or short service work.

Driving the Tourismo, it is responsive when required, though we have one small criticism - in order to pick up speed most drivers will use the kick down function, but this will increase fuel consumption. Two driver areas are available, one designed for express type work and the other more suited to touring. Therefore both modes will be catered for.

In the passenger area the sunken floor provides a raised seating area allowing passengers panoramic views both to the front and the side. The original Tourismo was quiet, but the claim is that the new coach is 50% quieter, which was evident. All seats have USB connections and plug-in points. Powered by the OM470, 420hp Euro 6 diesel and mated to the Mercedes PowerShift 3 auto box, the coach as tested costs €290,000.
Scania Interlink HD

Scania has recently enjoyed a dramatic increase in its coach sales, doubling market share in the last five years and increasing sales by 21% in 2016 from the previous year. Currently Scania claims 7% of the European market. One of the striking features of the coach was the truck influence in design terms and in component selection. Most of the front passenger door entrance is glazed which improves the visibility. Access at the front is easy, but the centre door is steep and not well equipped with grab handles. The floor is sunken and again allows for easy access through the aisle. Comfortable seating and a simple overhead control panel will be welcomed by passengers. With charging points at the centre of the seat, they are easily accessed from both sides. Overhead luggage space is a little tight but sturdy.

From the driver’s seat there was one stand out feature, a glass panel behind the driver’s left shoulder. It is surprising how much a quick glance can pick up here regarding surrounding traffic. Scania offers many options on length on this coach range from 11m to 15m. Powered by a Scania GRS0895R engine and 12 speed auto box with an integrated retarder, no SCR is required to achieve the regulated exhaust emission control. Scania also markets alternative drive options including Biogas, Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) and Natural Gas, and is planning to introduce an LNG version soon. Asked how the Interlink compared to the jointly designed Higer ‘Touring’ version we got the reply, “They are different products.” The price of the Interlink HD as tested is €290,000.

VDL Futura FDD2-141

With an increase in the popularity of Double Decker coaches in Europe, this has sparked a new focus by manufacturers. Numbers wise, the market has more than doubled from 200 to over 473 units per year in recent times. From a coachbuilder’s point of view, a double decker coach presents many challenges. Do I put the height upstairs or downstairs? What about the door positioning?

One of the first things noticeable about the Futura was that passengers can stand up on both decks. The secret is in a new ‘sandwich’ type design in the roof, and use of lighter weight components giving 1.86m headroom on the lower deck and 1.72 upstairs. On the test coach there were 74 seats, but it can be configured to accommodate 91 passengers at maximum for the Belgian market.

Passengers will be pleased with the comfort levels, as entry through both doors is easy with no high steps to encounter. Upstairs the overhead luggage racks are spacious enough, although in the lower section, they are understandably less spacious. There is no problem in reaching the control panel in the roof line and both staircases have well placed steps with the aid of safely positioned grab handles.

Driving the Futura was less challenging than imagined. Often a double decker gives a claustrophobic feeling, but the manner in which the lower deck slopes upward at the front provides the driver with a better view. In an urban setting one can see road signs and traffic lights a lot better. A low dash area and excellent mirror positioning removes most blind spots. One slight hiccup however is the position of the handbrake lever. Powered by the PACCAR (DAF) MX-13 510hp engine and coupled to the ZF AS-Tronic gearbox, the Futura is extremely agile. Although being one of the longest coaches on the test, it has a turning circle of 24.3m and at 14.4m. Price as tested is €490,000.
Brexit has become a great talking point, often spoken in the same terms as people used to converse about the price of houses ten years ago. It does not matter what business you are in, the ability to predict the effect it will have on any particular sector probably does not exist.

There are a lot of do-gooders spouting out advice to companies, warning them of the need to ‘Brexit-proof their companies’. It would be a fair achievement to be able to do this, particularly when the Establishment cannot tell anybody what it is doing.

Since the UK Referendum on the issue, it has been interesting to hear some Irish politicians, in particular those based in Europe or with a European focus, describe this as a European problem, which requires a European solution. Some even regard it as a British problem. All of this may be true, but if in the next two to three years British tourists stop coming to Ireland, it very quickly becomes a problem for us here. For coach operators that could be severe in volume terms.

Any judgement or future plan can only be made on factual information and unfortunately there is very little of that around. What is a fact is that when there is a fluctuation between the Euro and Sterling it effects the dynamics of trade in the Border area substantially. Away from the Border the domino effect continues, though maybe not as dramatically. In recent months the weakening of Sterling has meant that the strength of the Euro had a dramatic effect on the used vehicle market with thousands of cars, vans, trucks and buses being imported here. While it may not make the headlines in the media now, it is still a feature of the trade between Ireland and the UK.

I saw something else recently that may be a cause for concern. At the Busworld Show in Kortrijk, Belgium in October, there were many presentations by the bus and coach manufacturers. Normally these press conferences follow a similar path - some background on the company is presented at first, with commentary on the economy, followed by emphasis on the current range and then the new product is introduced. Often, potential problems or opportunities are articulated for both the brands and their customers, in other words passenger transport operators. Not once in the three days did I hear any reference to “Brexit” in any context, good, bad or indifferent. It was about the middle of the second day when the absence of the “B” word dawned on me. For the rest of the time the “B” word remained absent with the exception of a few mentions by people from the UK. I think the reality of this is that Brexit is not seen as a big issue for those in mainland Europe.

The most chilling piece of information that has emerged about Brexit in recent months came from the leaked internal Revenue report that indicated there would be no option in a post-Brexit situation but to have a ‘Hard Border’. A very sobering thought. Remember this is the agency that will have the say, and given the enthusiasm and the way they go about tax collection, there will be very little “soft” about the Border. So, any platitudes from well-intentioned politicians will, I think, count for very little. If this were to happen we will see another agency with more fancy uniforms patrolling our frontiers.

Is there a solution? Let’s hope the people of the UK take a leaf out of our book and re-run the Referendum, maybe then they will get the right result.
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