The "Wheels on the Bus Go Round' n Round" With Propane

The fanciful paint scheme of the 2004 General Motors dedicated propane school bus is more reminiscent of kid TV's "The Magic School Bus" than its typical ocher cousins. Caricatures of school children gaze from the windows. Bees, butterflies, and ladybugs flit and caper among beryl grasses and colorful flowers below them.

"Powered by Propane" and "We're breathing cleaner air" are emblazoned on a blue sky with puffy clouds. And although the propane school bus can't magically transform itself into a submarine or airplane like Ms. Frizzle's magic bus can in the children's books and TV show, it's been creating enthusiasm and excitement as it winds its way across the country.

The wheels of the propane bus have been going round and round to the tune of more than 16,000 miles now – without a breakdown. To date, the bus has made stops in Utah, Texas, Colorado, Nevada, California, Arizona, Oregon, and Georgia. At press time, the bus was traveling around North Carolina before heading to Orlando, Fla. For the 10th annual National Clean Cities Conference and Expo May 2-5.

"The propane school bus has been touring around the U.S. for the past five month and has been running beautifully," said Bill Platz, chairman of the Propane Vehicle Council (PVC). "It just completed its second trip across the country, and now has over 16,000 miles on it. The bus has made quite an impression on everyone, including over 200 school districts from across the U.S., many of which are interested in purchasing the bus."

The bus is an ultra-low-emission vehicle certified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the California Air Resources Board (CARB). Dealership distribution agreements are underway, and letters of commitment are being taken.

Houston-based Drew Bucci, the propane school bus' driver for more than 10,000 of its 16,000 miles, said motorists out on the highway often do double takes and tap their brakes. "People give me the thumbs up and kids wave. The reaction has all been good, all positive."

Recently, Bucci drove the bus 2,800 miles from Portland, Ore. To Macon, Ga., perhaps setting a world record for the longest bus route. In Macon, the bus was featured in the 10-day International Cherry Blossom Festival that attracted some 200,000 participants.

The school bus was jointed at the Cherry Blossom Festival by its sister vehicle, the 2004 dedicated General Motors shuttle bus. Both vehicles were used for display and participated in the children's parade. The shuttle bus was also used as a public shuttle. The low-floor shuttle bus, built by Heart International (Grand Blanc, Mich.) also will be featured at the National Clean Cities Conference.

Georgia Department of Education officials were so impressed with the vehicles they voted to include them in their next purchase cycle. After the festival, both buses traveled to Atlanta for the 54th annual National Propane Gas Association Southeastern Convention.

Since its unveiling at last November's annual Conference and Trade Show of the National Association for Pupil Transportation in Salt Lake City, the propane school bus has been seen by numerous school transportation directors, department of education

officials, Clean Cities coalitions, air district officials, and federal, state, and local elected officials.

The 2004 propane school bus is designed for the General Motors family-2 Cutaway Chassis. It features an 8.1-liter gasoline engine that has been converted to a dedicated propane system and an Allison automatic transmission with overdrive. The bus can be equipped to meet the needs of disabled students. Seven wheelbases are available.

The body is mounted on rubber bushings for maximum sound absorption and a soft ride. The one-piece, 14 gauge galvanized roof bows provide structural integrity on side impact or rollover.

The bus is the result of a successful propane industry collaboration that included the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC), PVC, and ProCon, a marketing consortium of propane providers and equipment manufacturers. Development funding came from the U.S. Department of Energy, ProCon, and PERC.

The bus is built by Corbeil Bus (Indianapolis, Ind.) utilizing a truck front end. The width of the frame is designed to accommodate a three-tank manifold with a total usable capacity of more than 50 gallons of propane fuel. The three-tank manifold enables better packaging and delivery of fuel, and is positioned between the frame rails to provide a robust and secure environment for durability and safety.

The dedicated sequential port injection system was developed and tested by Millbrook Proving Ground (Millbrook, England) under contract with the propane industry. Millbrook is a renowned center of expertise for automotive applications of propane fuel for numerous European vehicle manufacturers.

Corbeil Bus offers a five-year body warranty, while General Motors provides a two-year, unlimited mileage chassis warranty and an optional three-year, unlimited warranty.

Depending on demand, ProCon with Corbeil Bus will determine the roll-out date for the Family-3 version buses, which will have an increased passenger capacity of over 72 children and also come equipped with air brakes and a stronger and heavier chassis configuration. The current bus has seating capacity for up to 66 students.

For additional information regarding the 2004 propane school bus and propane shuttle bus, visit the Web sites at *www.propaneschoolbus.com* and *www.propanshuttlebus.com*. Anyone interested in viewing the bus, or arranging a ride-and-drive opportunity, is invited to contact Alexa Ratcliffe of AR & Co. at (805)545-5850, or email Penelope Schwartz at *eventsdesk@arandcompany.com*. - *John Needham*