Dwight E. Austin, born on September 26, 1897, was a natural born engineer who excelled at his profession despite the fact that his formal education ended at the eighth grade. In 1915 he joined his father and brother in the formation of an automobile repair business where he developed a knack for working with wood and metal which led the firm into the body building business. After the 1922 sale of his father’s business, Dwight was subsequently hired by the Pickwick Stages who appointed him designer and superintendent of its body works in 1923.

Austin was the man responsible for the legendary Pickwick intercity parlor-buffet coaches which were introduced on the Pierce-Arrow Model Z chassis in 1925. In March of 1927 Austin introduced the Pickwick observation-buffet coach which was followed four months later by an improved model with a novel elevated driver’s compartment in the form of a crow’s nest jutting out from the top of the vehicle. Both models were built on the purpose-built Pierce-Arrow Model Z bus chassis.

In mid-1928 Wren introduced the revolutionary Pickwick Nite Coach, an Austin-designed 26-passenger all-metal double-decked sleeping coach with elevated driving compartment and interchangeable power pack. The Nite Coach featured a semi-monocoque steel framework covered by Duralumin panels, adapted by Austin for motor coach use.

The Duralumin trade name was derived from the material’s manufacturer, Dürener Metallwerke AG, and aluminum, its primary component. The December 1922 SAE Journal featured a 5-page paper highlighting the advantages and potential uses of Duralumin by the automotive industry.

The age-hardened aluminum alloy was discovered by German metallurgist Alfred Wilm while working at Dürener Metallwerke AG (Düren, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany) in 1903. Wilm found that after quenching, an aluminum alloy containing 4% copper (+ small amounts of manganese and magnesium) would slowly harden when left at room temperature for several days.

Further refinements led to the commercial introduction of Duralumin in 1909. Pre-war, the material was confined for use by German industry which used it for framing the recently introduced rigid airship. After the War Dürener Metallwerke introduced a more tear-resistant formula that was adopted by the American aircraft industry in the late 20s who found it well suited to recently introduced monocoque construction techniques.

The Success of the 1928 Nite Coach prompted the introduction of a similar 59-passenger day coach, the Pickwick Duplex. In 1930, Austin did not rest on his laurels and in 1932 introduced a totally new Sleeper Coach which featured aerodynamic breadbox styling that wouldn’t appear on his competitor’s coaches until the late 1930s.

The September 4, 1925 San Jose Evening News announced the debut of the Pierce-Arrow Pickwick Parlor-Buffet Coach:

"Parlor-Buffet Coach is Latest Development"

"Marking the latest development in commercial auto travel, The Franciscan, ‘parlor-buffet’ motor coach, owned by the Pickwick stage company, is on exhibition today in front of the Union Stage depot at 25 S. Market St.

"The stage is the first of its kind ever constructed and is unique in that it is equipped with a buffet with a steam table in which hot meals will be prepared en route, a complete lavatory, smoking compartment, observation and parlor room."

"A steward is to be on duty in the car at all times."

"The stage was built at the Los Angeles shops of the Pickwick Stage Co., and is one of two of its kind which are to be put on between San Francisco and Los Angeles."
A 1925 issue of The Commercial Vehicle contained a small piece on the coaches:

“ARIZONIAN ESTABLISHES FIRST CALIF. AUTO TRAIN SERVICE

“TUCSON. Sept. 26, 1925—Passenger auto stages with all the conveniences of a modern Pullman coach have been established, on a romp between Los Angeles and San Francisco by Charles Wren, a former Tucsonan, brother-in-law of Judge S. W. Purcell.

“Extensive publicity was given the up-to-date enterprise by the California newspapers. These are said to be the first motor stages to include, with many other refinements and luxuries, a complete buffet for the preparation of meals a part in a cart and a well appointed lavatory and toilet.

“In other words, the former Tucson resident has applied Pullman conveniences to highway transportation for this first time. The service, which is to be expanded in inter-city road transportation in California, is known as the Pickwick Franciscan service.

“The following description of the stages is given by an admiring Los Angeles daily:

“Standards of motor stage travel a few days ago, christened by Mary Pickford who, along with a party, was on one of the stages that made the maiden trips between two California metropolises.

“Each of the new parlor-buffet cars has five compartments, each in itself and separated by glass doors from other parts of the coach.

“The ladies’ compartment seats 12 on splendidly soft-cushioned reclining arm chairs which occupy the forward portions of the cars. The smoking compartment and observation section are in the back of the car with buffet and lavatory on opposite sides of the, car separating the smoker and forward section.”

“Mr. Wren married Miss Tessie Purcell, sister of Judge Purcell.”

A 1925 issue of The Commercial Vehicle contained a small piece on the Pierce-Arrow Pickwick Parlor-Buffet coaches:

“Parlor-Buffet Service on Buses a Time Saver

“Ushering in a new era in automobile passenger transportation, Pickwick Stages Inc., on September 15 sent its first parlor-buffet motor coach from San Francisco to Los Angeles in 2 hours less time than by previous motor schedules.

“The new coach, with well-equipped buffet for preparing hot meals en route, and finely appointed rest room is the first car of its kind in all the history of motor transportation. Cutting out all the lunch and rest stops heretofore makes possible the saving of 2 hours in the schedule.

“There are 20 reclining arm chairs in the parlor buffet car, 12 in the front compartment and eight in the smoker. Each chair, finely upholstered, is equipped with a foot pedal, which tilts it back to a head rest position when desired by the passenger.

“Near each passenger, in the wall, is a button which, when depressed, signals the steward in the buffet, who is instantly at hand to take orders for hot or cold lunch a la carte. In the buffet are a gas range, coffee urns, bread toaster, ice cream container, refrigerator and other utensils of a well-equipped kitchen. In the hour or two of evening travel on the San Francisco-Los Angeles run, each passenger aboard the new car will control the light over his chair as he may see fit. A snap switch in the wall lights an electric light over each seat.

“The seats in the smoking section are of leather. Here there is a card table, ash trays and hat racks the same as found in railroad cars. There are 4 seats in this section built for observation. There are 5 plate-glass windows 24 in. high and 48 in. in, length, which enables occupants of this section to have a perfect view at the rear and at both sides. Each chair is provided with a white linen head-rest which is changed at the end of each run. At the press of a button the steward is summoned, who will bring food, cigars, papers, candy, ice cream drinking water or any article that is carried for the convenience of the passengers. The kitchen is located on the left side of the stage between the rear smoking compartment and the front or ladies’ compartment.

“A special system has been installed for notifying the driver if any of the stage doors are opened while the car is in motion. Each door is equipped with an

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Susan Meikle Mandell - A Historical Survey of Transit Buses in the United States
David Jacobs - American Buses, Greyhound, Trailways and Urban Transportation
Brian Grams & Andrew Gold - GM Intercity Coaches 1944-1980 Photo Archive
Dylan Frautschl - Greyhound in Postcards: Buses, Depots and Post Houses
The January 1926 issue of Better Buses featured the new Pierce-Arrow Pickwick Parlor-Buffet coaches:

“A Superlative Motor Coach Service By James V. Murray

“Superlative is the most appropriate word when describing "The Franciscan" — the new Parlor-buffet motor coach service now being operated by the Pickwick Stages System, between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

“It is its endeavor to rival the service features of such famous express trains, running between San Francisco and Los Angeles, as 'The Padre' and 'The Sunset Limited', the Pickwick people have, in many respects outpointed them. The Franciscan line, consisting of three up-to-the-minute, specially designed, built and equipped 20-passenger coaches, is becoming as famous as the long-established express trains in giving a matchless service which appeals to travelers from even the highest stations in life.

“Claiming to be the first in the world with a parlor-buffet automobile coach service to offer to the traveling public,

“Only the rear-end housings and the motors are purchased features of the automotive equipment. Everything else, including the body and upholstery, is the output of the big shops of the company in Los Angeles.

“Smooth riding qualities have been attained by the addition of powerful air-springs, both front and rear, which cradle the car so easily that dining while traveling is really a pleasure.

“These springs are an exclusive Pickwick feature, new in the motor transportation field. But we are not concerned so much with the mechanical features of the new coaches, and their running schedules, as we are with the service features offered to the public, and why they are entitled to be called ‘superlative’ in the auto-stage world.

“With a capacity for 20 people, there are twelve seats in the coach for ladies and eight for men. Those for ladies and their escorts are upholstered in fine velour, while the seats in the smoking section are upholstered in leather. The coaches are of the center-aisle type, and the seats are individual arm chairs with four reclining positions, operated at will by the passenger, by means of a ratchet device on the floor.

“High-backed chairs, higher than the head, afford a certain degree of privacy in the coach, as well as a comfortable head-rest. Removable linen covers adorn the head – rests, which are changed as often as the passenger, if necessary three or four times during the run, furnishing a… (Missing text) …Salads.

“The company does not wish to profit on its food service, and seventy-five cents covers the present charge for full meals, which is from 25 to 30 percent less than the average café charge for the same dishes. As soon as the operators find they are making money on meals, they will either reduce prices or increase the quality of the food. At present, however, the meals are as attractive and adequate as
those of any restaurant, and there has not been a single complaint registered on its “dining car service” since the new de luxe express line has been in operation.

“Disappearing card tables, which fold into the side of the coach, afford amusement to the occupants of the men’s smoking compartment, and in this single highly efficient, automotive unit there are such features as ice-cold drinking water with sanitary cups; lavatories for men and women, with hot and cold running water and toilet conveniences. And the towels are free. The only waste shed on the highway are the remains of the drinking water and the water used for washing purposes. Everything else is pumped into an antiseptic tank, which is emptied at each terminal and is odorless.

“Two steam cooking tables and an adequate sanitary ice chest are important features of the kitchen equipment. Alongside the driver is a large compartment, with a capacity for forty pieces of luggage. As the driver is in an enclosed section of the coach, this arrangement insures the baggage being protected from rain and does away with the baggage rack on the rear of the coach body. There are hat and parcel racks over each pair of seats, and ventilators provide fresh air for the coach even when inclement weather causes the closing of the windows.

“A peculiar individual service, and a highly welcome one to the traveler, is that rendered by the steward to each passenger. When the coach is within three miles of a passenger’s destination, the steward approaches him, informs him that the stage will soon arrive at the traveler’s getting off place, brush off his hat and his shoes, procures his baggage for him and dusts that off, helps him off the stage and hands him his luggage with a smile.”

The February 1926 issue of Motor Record included the following item concerning the Pierce-Arrow Pickwick Parlor-Buffet coaches:

“Parlor Motor Coaches Last Word in Riding Comfort by Francis A. Emmons

“The recent opening of the Pickwick Parlor Motor Coach Stage Line between Los Angeles and San Francisco marks a new epoch in highway transportation. These motor coaches are the first to include dining service with a steward, and lavatory with toilet. The Pickwick stage system is the outgrowth of an auto stage line that was initiated thirteen years ago between San Diego and Escondido, Mexico, by A.S. Hayes with one little Ford touring car.

“The original auto stage line has been gradually expanded by extensions, additions and consolidations until today the Pickwick system comprises 200 coaches and covers 5,000 miles of western highways, operating from the Mexican to the Canadian border and east to El Paso, Texas.

“The Pickwick Parlor Buffet Motor Coaches are 32 feet in length, 8 feet wide and are powered by Pierce-Arrow motors rated at 66 H. P. but which deliver over 100 H. P. while in actual use at normal speeds.”

In 1926 the Pickwick Corporation built its first hotel, an 8-story neo-Gothic structure located in downtown San Francisco near Union Square. The Pickwick was prominently featured in Dashiell Hammett’s popular mystery, The Maltese Falcon, which was made into a number of motion pictures during the 1930s and 40s, one of which starred Humphrey Bogart.

After San Diego’s Pickwick Theater closed down, Wren move his operations into the newly constructed Pickwick Terminal Hotel, which opened its doors in May 1927. The neo-Gothic twin-towered hotel was located at the corner of First and Broadway and was considered to be San Diego’s most luxurious hotel at the time.

In 1928 the Pickwick Corp. bought San Diego radio station KFBC, the first of two stations that would form the Pickwick Broadcasting Corporation. The station’s name was changed to KGB to reflect the involvement of George Bowles, its station manager and PBC’s vice-president. KGB’s studio and transmitter were relocated to the new Pickwick Terminal Hotel remaining there until 1944. Pickwick Broadcasting Corp. later purchased KTM in Santa Monica, whose slogan was ‘KTM, the station with a smile’. KGB remains famous today as being the first employer of Art Linkletter, who served as a staff announcer while he attended San Diego State University during 1933.

Midway through 1928 Dwight Austin completed the vehicle with which he would forever be associated with, the Pickwick Nite Coach. The monocoque framework’s principal structural members were 7-inch steel channels which extended along the lower outside edge of the coach tied together by 14 cross members of 4-inch seamless steel tubing forming a foundation to which the body framing and chassis were affixed. The heavy outside channels along the vehicles circumference also served as a guard rail, protecting the occupants of the coach from intrusion in the case of a collision.

Three additional steel and Duralumin channels ran along the entire length of the coach providing the upper and lower framework of the passenger windows which were fitted between pressed steel uprights that connected the 7-inch steel channel with the Duralumin upper framework. The vehicle’s exterior was made up of double-walled Duralumin panels filled with Thermosote, a tar-impregnated wood fibre insulation board manufactured by the Agasote Millboard Co.

The coach had a central aisle intermediate the two decks with single steps leading up and down into the thirteen 2-passenger compartments. Headroom over the center aisle was 86
inches and its roof was composed of a central Duralumin backbone and framework covered by insulating board and a heavy nitrite-coated canvas cover.

The Nite Coach's front-mounted engine was built into a removable carrier frame which was fitted with a 110 horsepower Sterling Petrel 6-cylinder gasoline engine and Brown-Lipe transmission. Equipped with powerful air brakes, power was delivered to the rear wheels via a driveshaft that rode inside a 22 inch wide central isle which was constructed of made up of heavy 1/8 inch Duralumin plate. From the center aisle, steel uprights ran up to the roof forming a central framework to which the various compartment partitions and braces were attached. The resulting steel and Duralumin honeycomb resulted in a durable two story coach weighing little more than a standard single deck 33-passenger coach. The windows were made from shatterproof glass framed by composite Duralumin and Bakelite frames.

It is generally agreed that only four Nite Coaches were built (Carlton Jackson claims five), the first of which was christened the Alsacia after Alsacia M. Wren, one of Charles F. Wren's two daughters. The Alsacia had an unusual flat rear roof over the rear-most first floor cabin, a feature not found on subsequent Nite Coaches which all featured a fastback rear roof with an enclosed luggage compartment. The next Nite Coach built, the Gladys, was named after Gladys I. Wren, Charles F. Wren's second daughter. The third coach constructed was christened the Morpheus, after the Greek god of dreams and sleep, while the name of the fourth and final first series Nite Coach has been lost to history.

In an interview with author Curtis Jackson, T.T. Davis, a former Nite Coach driver, recalled that driving the highway behemoths was a generally miserable experience and although the driver was isolated from the passengers by a glass partition, he was forced to sit directly over the poorly insulated, hot and noisy, engine compartment for hours at a time.

On long overnight runs, the Nite Coach was typically staffed by a porter and two drivers, one of whom typically slept while the other drove. According to Davis, the porter, who was normally African-American, had the best job of all:

"They earned as much money on one of these trips as a driver did in a month. The soft drink and food concessions were entirely theirs, and the ice they used was furnished free by the company. At the end of the line, the porter usually tipped the drivers anywhere from five to ten dollars each."

The following letter to the editor appeared in the June 25, 1928 issue of Time magazine:

"Pickwick Stages

"Sirs: Aren't you a little "behind TIME"?

"In TIME, June 4, there is a short article concerning transcontinental motor stage service instituted by the California Transit Co. of Los Angeles.

"Please note that the Pickwick Stages System, also of Los Angeles, has been operating transcontinental motor stage service for some months, utilizing strictly its own coaches straight through from California to Philadelphia, by way of Phoenix, El Paso, St. Louis and Indianapolis—with an optional route by way of Salt Lake City and Denver.

"You will also be interested in knowing that this company designs and builds all its own equipment—that it operates over some 8,000 miles of highway routes.

"Here's another interesting one. Pickwick Started about three years ago to operate Observation-Dining cars along the California Coast High-Way, between San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco. These stages now have upper decks, raised pilot houses for drivers, lavatory, radio, kitchen, and chef who prepares and serves hot meals while the cars are in motion.

"Charles F. Wren, of Los Angeles, is the guiding spirit and president of the Pickwick System, who has consistently pushed motor stage service across from West to East, and who has sponsored the many original features of equipment and service begun by this company.

"F. R. McCABE
Beaumont & Hohman,
Los Angeles, Calif."

The Nite Coach was debuted to the public during the 1928 Pacific Southwest Exposition which was held in Long Beach, California. Movie star Clara Bow was pictured with the vehicle and its picture was published in numerous newspapers and magazines, many of which included re-formatted versions of Pickwick's press release. Three slightly different versions follow. The first is from the August 14, 1928 Capital Times, Madison Wisconsin:

"Newest Motor Coach Is Veritable Hotel on Wheels Has Dining Rooms, Berths and Balcony

"$30,000 Vehicle Will Be Used On San Diego, 'Frisco Trip

"The newest in the line of motor transportation is the Pickwick 'Nitecoach', a veritable hotel on wheels, having thirteen double sleeping compartments which may be converted to dayrooms, a kitchen and dining facilities, and a second deck for use in fair weather."
Dwight Austin, engineer of the Pickwick Co., is the designer and inventor of this palatial motor bus, which will be used between Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego. Its construction was finished on July 30, and the coach was to be shown at the Long Beach Pacific Southwest exposition before making its maiden trip.

"Over 34 Feet Long

The 'Nitecoach' is 34 feet and six inches long, eight feet wide, ten feet high, weighs 14,000 pounds, and cost $30,000. Following are the complete details of the new road monster. Here are a few points of interest:

"Construction: Solid metal throughout, steel frame and cross-members with Duralumin body. Duralumin stronger than steel and as light as aluminum. No wood in body or coachwork. There is no chassis on the 'Nitecoach' – Heavy frame of I-beam steel around the car just below the lower berth windows serves as chassis and as a guard rail which protects the coach and passengers

"Sleeping accommodations: Capacity 26 passengers in 13 compartments. The compartments are arranged in upper and lower decks with an aisle running down the center or the coach. Single step from aisle to either upper or lower deck. Each compartment accommodates 2 people and is equipped with upper and lower berths. Passengers, sit facing each other during the daytime and the seats are used to form the berths at night. Each berth is 6 ft. 4 inches long and of ample width, beds are covered with a mattress which is carried under the scats. Adjoining the bed is a dressing space with full head room and heavy draw curtains to cut it off from the rest of the car. In each compartment are five lights, a thermos jug of ice water, a wash basin with running water, an extra seat for convenience in dressing, two large drawers for the clothing and personal effects of passengers and space to store two suitcases.

"Portholes For Ventilation

"Ventilation: Each compartment has three windows and two portholes. Large center window closed at night and smaller windows on each end of berth are opened. Portholes supply ventilation to lower berths. Fan ventilation system supplies warm or cold air to individual compartments as desired.

"Interior finish: Ceilings and walls of coach are lined with composition paneling which serves as a noise deadener as well as insulator against weather. The floor is of composite composition. Seats upholstered in brown-green upholstery which blends with the finish of the coach. Artistic drape curtains over all windows. Unbreakable glass divisions between compartments and aisle space are provided with curtains for privacy.

"Kitchen and lavatory: Lavatory located directly in the rear of the car and equipped with flushing toilet, chemical tank for collection of waste, wash stand with running water and full length plate glass mirror. The kitchen is located in the entranceway of the car and is complete in every detail. Range, percolator, toaster, ice box and cooking utensils as well as table wear for 20 passengers carried. Meals will be served on tables in the compartments.

"Uses 6-Cylinder Motor

"Outside finish: The car is a radical departure from any previous design, streamlined to the last degree. Portholes and windows make it resemble an ocean liner. Finished in blue, black and grey lacquer.

"Motor: A powerful 6-cylinder motor built entirely in the Pickwick shops is used. An unusual feature is the fact that the motor, transmission and all units around the motor can be slid out and replaced by a new power plant in a few minutes time by merely loosening 4 bolts and disconnecting electric, gas and oil lines. This will be used on all future Pickwick equipment and will eliminate delays due to motor trouble. Reserve motors will be kept at all terminal points. Motor generates 110 horsepower

"Crew: Cook and steward to care for car and make up berths, and driver.

"Miscellaneous: Designed and invented by Dwight Austin, brilliant Pickwick engineer who also drafted plans for Pickwick Observation Buffet car with raised observation seats and raised driver's cab. Austin personally drafted plans for the Nitecoach on a specially constructed 30 foot drawing board."

A slightly altered version of the release was published in the August 26, 1928 Pittsburgh Press:

"First Auto Bus Sleeper Ready For Use

"Amazing Pickwick Coach has Sleeping Quarters for 26 Passengers, Crew.

"Special To the Pittsburgh Press

"Los Angeles, Aug 25, 1928 – What seems to be the final stage in motor bus construction seems to have been reached in the 'Nitecoach' bus introduced this week by the Pickwick Stages systems at the Pacific Southwest Exposition in Long Beach, Cal.
The spectacular car containing 13 compartments offers comfortable sleeping quarters for 26 people, a complete dining service, lavatory and many other unusual features. Its has been christened by Clara Bow, vivacious screen star, in the presence of more than 20,000 people at the exposition.

"Designed and built in atmosphere of greatest secrecy in the Pickwick shops here, the new car has come as a complete surprise to the transportation world and to the public. At first glance, it appears to be a gleaming blue and gray submarine on bulging balloon tires, for it is gracefully streamlined and is equipped with portholes as well as big observation windows.

"There is no hood as on the ordinary motor bus, the portion of the body containing the driver's compartment being built directly over the motor.

"But the big surprise is to find that this compact vehicle, no larger than other deluxe cars being operated by the Pickwick System, has sleeping room for 26 adults, with comfortable sleeping space during the day as well. The entrance is an arched doorway near the front of the car, opening immediately on a compact kitchen which is part of the regular equipment. His section opens into a high-roofed center aisle running the length of the car, on either side of which are found 13 compartments on the upper and lower decks.

"The mystery of where so many passengers can find both seating and sleeping accommodations is cleared up when the car is examined. By an ingenious arrangement, upper and lower compartments are made to interlock, reducing the height of the car to only a few inches above the ordinary single-deck stage. The center aisle is located half way between the floors of upper and lower decks, so that it is but a short step down or up to either level.

"Miniature Staterooms

"Head room of center aisle is seven feet from floor to ceiling, and the aisle is 22 inches wide. Heavy sliding curtains give privacy to each compartment at night. With curtains drawn aside, each compartment is revealed as a little stateroom, with two deep cushioned chairs facing each other and a wide three-paneled window extending its full length. These windows, all moveable, have both shades and draw curtains.

"That these compartments are deserving to be called staterooms is shown by the following features: In each there is a built-in thermos jug of ice water and a gleaming nickel wash basin with running water. Two sliding drawers, measuring 14 by 17 inches, are for clothing and personal effects. There is space where a suitcase may be stored, making it completely accessible at all times. It is almost impossible, until one has seen the car, to imagine where all this space in each compartment can be.

"A porter demonstrates the most interesting featured of the 'Nitecoach' by making up the berths in a compartment. He deftly swings up the back of each seat, which is hinged at the top, until lower ends join, thus forming a single bed 24 inches wide. This makes the upper berth. From under the seats he produces a mattress and lays it over the cushioned seat backs, adding linen and blankets to make a snug and inviting bed. The lower berth is just as easily made up. The lower portion of each seat is in two sections, which are arranged along the floor to form a continuous cushion. With the blankets and pillow, this also becomes a comfortable bed.

"Full Head Room

"The interlocking feature of compartments allows a private dressing room for each, directly adjoining. This space is six feet four inches high, permitting occupants of the compartment to stand upright while dressing. It is a little over three feet long, and while only 18 inches wide, the berth space gives additional room to make dressing easy. A plate glass mirror above the wash basin is an additional convenience. The dressing room is curtained off from the aisle and is provided with a folding seat.

"Five electric lights in each compartment five plenty of illumination. There is one light at the head and one at the foot of each bed, as well as one in the dressing room, all controlled by individual switches. The aisle is also indirectly lighted at night.

"Ventilation and heating are given much attention. When berths are made up a night, the wide center windows are locked shut, for safety, but the two smaller windows in each compartment can be opened at the will of the occupants. In addition, there are portholes all around the car, which give perfect ventilation, aided by electric fans. In cold weather fresh fan-circulated warm air is forced through the car.

"Hot Meals Served

"In the compact kitchen in the front of the car a steward prepares hot lunches on order at any time of the day. They are served on large trays to passengers in their compartments. The chef's culinary equipment is ample, consisting of a sizable range, refrigerator, coffee percolator, food containers, space for all cooking utensils and tableware. Aisle space at the entrance of the car gives plenty of
elbow room in the kitchen while the car is in motion and door closed.

“The construction features of the ‘Nitecoach’ are next in interest after curiosity about sleeping arrangements has been satisfied. The car is different in construction from any previous type of motor stage. It has no chassis, as the word is generally understood, the frame and body being one unit. For additional strength they are riveted together, not bolted. The heavy frame of I-beam steel is seen on the outside of the car, extending clear around as a graceful bend or belt line. Passengers on the lower deck are inside this sturdy, practically impregnable to outside shocks.

“More Engine Power

“Proportions of the new car are imposing, but do not exceed those of the ordinary large motor stage. The ‘Nitecoach’ measures 34 feet four inches long, 10 feet three inches high and eight feet wide. The weight is about 14,000 pounds, actually less that that of some cars Pickwick is now operating. This light weight is due to the use of Duralumin in the construction of nearly every part of the body. This is a costly metal that is as strong as steel but as light as aluminum. Duralumin, according to Pickwick engineers, is less easily crystallized than steel, adding greatly to the safety of vehicles constructed of it. Cross members of four-inch seamless steel tubing, placed at frequent intervals, add to the rigidity and strength of the ‘Nitecoach’ body. Sheets of Duralumin cover the whole car in a solid shell, lined with thermosote, a composition paneling which serves as insulation against heat and cold.

“Motor Pickwick Made

“The motor in the ‘Nitecoach’ is an exclusive Pickwick design and construction. It develops over 110 horsepower, ample for sustained power over all kinds of highways. The differential, transmission and other important units are also the product of this company’s plant.

“A remarkable new feature developed by the engineers is the manner in which the motor can be removed for repair or replacement. A few bolts are loosened, oil, gas and electric lines disconnected, and the complete power plant is slid forward and out of the frame almost instantly. The feature will eliminate delays due to motor trouble, for the motor can be taken out and a new one bolted in place anywhere along the route.

“The driver, in a compartment entirely separate from the passengers, is located immediately above the motor, high enough to give him a much better view of the highway than is possible in ordinary motor stages. The engine is quickly accessible beneath the floor boards.

“The Pickwick system has a brilliant young engineer named Dwight Austin, whose brain furnished almost every detail of the ‘Nitecoach’. He completed the design early in 1928 and construction was begun the middle of May. The car was completed the last of July – a surprising record, considering that an entirely new type of car was being built and every detail of design and construction was new and puzzling.”

The third version appeared in the September 2, 1928 Avalanche-Journal (Lubbock, Texas):

“Worlds First Motor Stage Sleeper Completed

“The final and highest plane of motor bus construction has been reached as the Pickwick Stages System presents the ‘Nitecoach,’ with comfortable sleeping quarters for 26 people.

“This spectacular car, with its 13 compartments, complete dining service, lavatory and many other unusual features has just been exhibited for the first time at the Pacific Southwest Exposition at Long Beach, California, and is providing one of the biggest attractions at this world showplace.

“Twenty-thousand people crowded the court in which the car was christened by Clara Bow, vivacious screen star, and every day since this event, an average of 3,500 people have passed through the unusual coach.

“The spectacular ‘Nitecoach’ looks like nothing else astwheel or afloat. At first glance it appears to visitors like a gleaming blue and gray submarine on bulging balloon tires, for it is gracefully streamlined and is equipped with portholes as well as big observation windows. There is no hood as on the ordinary stage, the portion of the body containing the driver’s compartment being built directly over the motor. From tapered prow to rear observation deck, the Nitecoach is as graceful as a yacht.

“Comfort Day and Night for 26 Passengers

“But the big surprise is to find that this compact vehicle, no larger than other deluxe cars, has sleeping room for 26 adults, with comfortable sleeping space during the day as well! The entrance is an arched doorway near the front of the car, opening immediately on a compact kitchen which is part of the regular equipment. This section opens into a high-roofed center aisle running the length of the car, on either side of which are ranged the thirteen compartments on the
The mystery of where so many passengers can find both seating and sleeping accommodations is cleared up when the car is examined. By a most ingenious arrangement, the upper and lower compartments are made to interlock, reducing the height of the car to only a few inches above the ordinary single-deck stage. The center aisle is located halfway between the floors of upper and lower decks, so that it is but a short step down or up to either level.

Miniature Staterooms

Head room of center aisle is enough for a giant - seven feet from floor to ceiling - and the aisle is 22 inches wide. Heavy sliding curtains give privacy to each compartment at night. With curtains drawn aside, each compartment is revealed as a little stateroom, with two deep cushioned chairs facing each other and a wide three-paneled window extending its full length. These windows, all moveable, have both shade and draw curtains.

That these compartments are deserving to be called staterooms is shown by the following features: In each there is a built-in thermos jug of ice water and a gleaming nickel wash basin with running water. Two sliding drawers, measuring fourteen by seventeen inches, are for clothing and personal effects. There is space where a suitcase may be stored, making it completely accessible at all times. It is almost impossible, until one has seen the car, to imagine where all this space in each compartment can be.

A white-clad porter demonstrates the most interesting feature of the ‘Nitecoach’ by making up the berths in a compartment. He deftly swings up the back of each seat, which is hinged at the top, until lower ends join, thus forming a single bed 24 inches wide. This makes the upper berth. From under the seats the porter produces a mattress and lays it over the cushioned seat backs, adding linen and blankets to make a snug and inviting bed. The lower berth is just as easily made up. The lower portion of each seat is in two sections, which are arranged along the floor to form a continuous cushion. With the addition of mattress, sheets, blankets and pillow, this also becomes a comfortable bed. The length of each birth is ample, being six feet four inches. While berths are being made up by the porter, passengers find comfortable extra seats at both front and rear of the car. Including the small folding seat in each dressing room, the Nitecoach has a total seating capacity of forty-dour, although twenty-six is considered a full load.

Dressing Rooms Have Full Head Room

The interlocking feature of compartments allows a private dressing room for each, directly adjoining. This space is six feet four inches high, permitting occupants of the compartment to stand upright while dressing. It is a little over three feet long, and while only 18 inches wide, the berth space gives additional room to make dressing easy. A plate glass mirror above the wash basin is an additional convenience. The dressing room is curtained off from the aisle and is provided with a folding seat.

Five electric lights in each compartment give plenty of illumination. There is one light at the head and one at the foot of each bed, as well as one in the dressing room, all controlled by individual switches. The aisle is also indirectly lighted at night.

Ventilation and heating are given much attention. When berths are made up a night, the wide center windows are locked shut, for safety, but the two smaller windows in each compartment can be opened at the will of the occupants. In addition, there are portholes all around the car, which give perfect ventilation, aided by electric fans. In cold weather fresh fan-circulated warm air is forced through the car.

Steward Prepares, Serves Hot Meals.

In the compact kitchen in the front of the car a steward prepares hot meals on order at any time of the day. They are served on large trays to passengers in their compartments. The chef's culinary equipment is ample, consisting of a sizeable range, refrigerator, coffee percolator, food containers, space for all cooking utensils and tableware. Aisle space at the entrance of the car gives plenty of elbow room in the kitchen while the car is in motion and the door closed.

Lavatory is located at the rear of the car, and is complete in every way. Chemical tanks take care of all the waste until division points are reached on cross-country runs.

The Nitecoach carries a crew of three - a driver, a steward and a porter - assuring prompt service for all needs of passengers.

Strength and Beauty Combined

The construction features of the Nitecoach are next in interest after curiosity about sleeping arrangements has been satisfied. The Nitecoach is different in construction from any previous type of motor stage. The car has no chassis, as the word is generally understood, the frame and body being built as a unit. For additional strength they are riveted together, not bolted. The heavy frame of I-
The following article from the September 25, 1928 Hayward Review (Hayward, California) is significant only for the fact that it states that 45 Nite Coaches were “soon to be in operation”:

“The proportions of the new car are imposing, but do not exceed those of the ordinary large motor stage. The Nitecoach measures thirty-four feet four inches long, ten feet three inches high and eight feet wide. The weight is about 14,000 pounds, actually less than that of some ears now satisfactorily operating on the highways.

“Almost every unit in the new Pickwick car is now produced in the Pickwick shops. The motor in the Nitecoach is an exclusive-Pickwick design and construction. It develops over 110 horsepower, which is ample for sustained power over all kinds of highways. The differential, transmission and other important units are also the products of this company’s big plant.”

A late 1928 issue of Autobody announced the completion of the firm's new $300,000 factory:


“$60,000 “Nite - Coach” Inspected by Hundreds here today

“The ‘Alsacia’, juggernaut of the highways that at a terrific rate is to eat up the miles and miles of bituminous and concrete ribbon between Hayward and New York city - one of a flock of 45 that are soon to be in operation - arrived in this city this afternoon and for an hour or two stood in front of the Auto Cigar Store and Pickwick stage station and almost bid the Villa hotel.

“This is the first ‘Nite coach’ of the Pickwick Stage company, and it was brought here as an advertising stunt incident to the opening of the new Pickwick hotel at Fifth and Mission streets, San Francisco, Saturday night. This is to be a big tent in the metropolis, and there is to be a tremendous program, to which the public is invited. The Pickwick people are now the owners of KTAB which is to be operated from the new hotel, and it is said that 75 loud speakers will be provided for the crowd next Saturday.

“A Formidable Coach

“The ‘Alsacia’ is a two-deck affair that looks like a combination of battleship, desert armored car, World War tank, and a Pullman sleeper. It is the commercial auto deluxe, is designed to furnish all that the crack railroad flyers furnish, make night trips as comfortable as a palace car, and day rides more comfortable than sitting in a hotel lobby's big leather chair. It is twenty to thirty feet long, as wide as a roadway will stand and give other cars room to pass, and it is provided with every available convenience, night and day for twenty-six passengers. Meals are served en route, there is an observation section - though the whole car is largely glass - lavatory convenience is there, drinking fountain with ice water, the beds look like Pullman offering, and, apparently nothing is lacking - not even the colored porter. The big car rolled in here with a chauffeur, a porter and electrician looking after the big bus, together with three others deadheads, so to speak.

“These were M. S. Wren, brother of the head of the Pickwick corporation; T. R. McCreedy, the Oakland agent, and a Dr. Hayes. The ‘Alsacia’ is reputed to have cost $60,000, and it looks like there is that much steel and glass about the big boat, not counting the inside trimmings. Hundreds of people went through the machine here, and aside from the fact that men like Bill Knightly and Dave Roberts have to grease their hips in going through the aisle in the center of the coach, there was little difference in the trip from that down the aisle of the Twentieth Century Limited. It looks like a way that a whole lot of people are going to travel henceforth and forever more - before they finally take to the airplane.”

On March 29, 1929, Pickwick entered the air transportation business by inaugurating an airline service between Los Angeles and San Diego. 10-passenger tri-motorized Bach 3-CT-6 Air Yachts were used, making two trips daily. The fare was $9.75 one-way or $19.00 round trip.

On May 12, 1929, a similar daily service was inaugurated between Los Angeles and San Francisco costing $32.50 one-way and $65.50 round trip. The Bach 3-CT-6 left Glendale's Grand Central Air Terminal at 8:30 a.m. arriving at San Francisco's Mills Field at 11:45 a.m. The plane made the return trip to Los Angeles mid-afternoon, arriving at Grand Central at 6:45 p.m.
During 1929 Pickwick-Greyhound advertised an ambitious Pacific to Atlantic in 2 days service that utilized Pickwick Airways' Bach Air Yachts and Pickwick-Greyhound's Nite Coaches. The service was first announced to the public at the National Aeronautical Exposition, which was held at Mines Field, Los Angeles in October of 1928. The October 10, 1928 Eugene Guard reported:

"Coach, Plane Combined For Quick Travel.

"Los Angeles to Chicago in a day and two nights, with restful sleeping hours aboard the palatial motor sleeper – thrilling daylight hours in a tri-motored Bach Air Yacht. Such is the program outlined by the Pickwick Airways, Incorporated, to be put into effect as quickly as its fleet of planes can be completed. The first definite announcement of this plan was made by Charles F. Wren, president of the Pickwick stages system, and organizer of the new air company – coincident with the display of the Nite Coach and ten-passenger place at the National Aeronautical exposition, Mines field, Los Angeles.

"Operation of the Pickwick airways will begin with twice-daily schedules between San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco, to be followed immediately by a daily California to Chicago schedule, with direct air connections at Chicago for New York and Atlantic coast cities. The first planes, now under construction, are expected to take the air before the end of the year. While similar combinations of cross-continent air-and-land travel have been projected, the Pickwick organization has taken the first definite steps toward its realization, with a large fleet of air cruisers ordered and being built by the Bach Aircraft company of Venice.

"The tentative route from Pacific to Atlantic, as outlined by President Wren, is as follows: starting from Los Angeles in the evening, travelers will find restful sleep in compartments of the 26 passenger Pickwick Nite Coach, awakening the following morning at the aviation field of Phoenix, Arizona. A few minutes later one or more huge passenger planes will soar from the field and head into the east, making passenger stops at El Paso, Dallas, Tulsa, Springfield and Kansas City, with the first day's destination set at St Louis. The air trip from Phoenix to St Louis will take about 14 hours, and will be made in full daylight, revealing the colorful mountains and plains of the southwest and Midwest for more than 1500 miles.

"At St. Louis the trip will be resumed by Nite Coach to Chicago, arriving in the early morning hours, with passengers rested and ready for a business day – or a further short hop to New York by co-operating air lines.

"Business Time Saved

"It is pointed out that only one business day will be lost in the trip to Chicago, and that if the journey is commenced on a Saturday evening, no business hours are sacrificed.

"At San Francisco, planes of the Pickwick Airways will make direct connections with those of the West Coast Air Transport company, which has created one of America's outstanding records of success and safety in passenger transportation. Using the same type plane ordered by the Pickwick Airways, the West Coast Air Company has maintained regular services between San Francisco, Portland and Seattle, carrying capacity loads. A notable feature in the record of this company is that several of its planes have had 900 flying hours each – an equivalent of 90,000 miles, or more that three times around the globe – and that they show no sign of wear or weakening after covering this immense distance.

"Motor In Record Flight

"The Bach air yachts to be used by the Pickwick Airways are powered with Pratt & Whitney 'Hornet' motors, developing as much as 600 horsepower. They recently acquired fame through Art Goebel's amazing non-stop flight across the continent, which lowered all previous records by several hours. Goebel's engine was of the 'Wasp' type.

"There are three of these motors – any two of which, or the center one alone being capable of sustaining the ten-passenger plane in continuous flight, while a long and safe gliding range is possible with all motors quiet. Two pilots on duty at all times, a complete set of duplicated controls, the absence of all exposed wire, and many other features combine to make these air cruisers as safe as human ingenuity can devise. A safety factor that also adds greatly to passenger comfort is the system of hydraulic shock absorbers in the landing gear, which permits smooth landing and take-off at all times.

"Great speed is possible with the Bach planes – 170 miles per hour or more- but the flying speed will be closer to 110 or 120 miles per hours, leaving a valuable reserve for emergency. Strength, scientific speed lines, and safety features have won these planes high praise and the recommendation of national air bodies for use in interstate flying.

"A new idea in stowing baggage in is the utilization of space in a rear compartment of the fuselage. Each air yacht is lined with richly finished walnut woodwork, has comfortable air-cushioned arm chairs, sliding observation
On July 29, 1929, an additional Pickwick Airways service was initiated between Los Angeles and Mexico City, and Mexico City, Mexico to Guatemala City, Guatemala, a route formerly operated by the Latin-American Air Transport Co. of Mexico City.

To help publicize the new service, the Pickwick Latin American Airways hired female aviatrix Pancho Barnes (Mrs. Florence Lowe Barnes) to fly from Los Angeles to Mexico City in February of 1930. On the five-day round trip Pancho stopped in Tucson and Nogales, Arizona and Los Mochis, Mazatlan and Guadalajara, Mexico. Accompanying her as navigator and interpreter was Marino Samaniego, movie star Ramon Novarro's brother. Pancho successfully reached Mexico City and was awarded an honorary Mexican pilot's license.

Coincidentally, another female pilot named Mildred Morgan had completed a similar journey two weeks earlier. During 1930 and 1931 Morgan was sometimes employed by Radio Station KTM, Pickwick Broadcasting's Santa Monica radio station and the two women's flights may have been part of a larger publicity stunt that remains as yet undiscovered. However, the aviatrix' flights were of historical importance as both claimed to be the first female pilot to fly from Los Angeles to Mexico City. With the arrival of the Depression and the failure by the company to land a U.S. mail contract, Pickwick Latin American Airways went out of business later that spring as did the related Pickwick Airways.

In 1930 Pickwick-Greyhound opened a $600,000 six-story hotel/terminal in Salt Lake City which was followed by a colossal $3,500,000 hotel and bus terminal in Kansas City, Missouri.

In June 1929 the Pickwick Corporation entered into a merger agreement with the Minnesota-based Northland Transportation Company (aka Greyhound) forming a cohesive transportation system that covered the Western half of the United States, all the way from the Pacific Coast to the Mississippi River.


Pacific Greyhound operated an interstate motor coach system from Portland, Ore. to San Diego, Cal. with 406 motor coaches, and a yearly mileage of approximately 20 million coach miles. The firm's officers and directors were as follows:


Greyhound's Western States operation was eventually divided into 3 companies, Pacific Greyhound Lines, Pickwick-Greyhound Lines Inc., and Southland Greyhound Lines, Inc.

Wren's Pickwick Corporation held major interests in both the Pickwick-Greyhound and Pacific Greyhound Lines. The merged operations represented a rolling stock of 1,400 buses, which covered a total of 190,000 miles of highway each day. Greyhound covered 28,000 miles of Western U.S. highway, carrying 10,000,000 passengers annually resulting in a total of 75,000,000 bus miles per year.

Twenty-one Pickwick-Greyhound passengers were killed on April 12, 1930 when a Santa Fe mail collided with the vehicle at a rail crossing in Isleta, New Mexico. The Associated Press wire service reported:

"19 PASSENGERS KILLED AS TRAIN SIDESWIPES BUS

"7 Survive Worst Accident in History of Western Bus Transportation

"DRIVER AMONG VICTIMS

"Impact of Crash Terrific; Parts of Bus and 2 Bodies Carried 1/2 Mile From Crash

"Isleta, N. M., April 11, 1930—(A.P.)— A fast Santa Fe mail train today crushed a Pickwick Greyhound motor stage, killing 19 persons, 18 passengers on the bus, and the driver.

"The accident was the worst in the history of Western bus transportation. The train sideswiped the stage as the driver tried frantically to swing it clear of the oncoming locomotive and the terrific impact so mangled the bodies of the victims that late today identification of three had not been made. Eight persons were injured seriously.

"Demolished by the collision, the bus was ignited by flames which licked over it from the gasoline tank and the bodies of the victims were robbed of clothing by the fire which, in some instances charred the flesh itself. Two bodies and parts of the bus were carried half a mile by the speeding train.

"The Old and the New in Transportation"
Neither the Pickwick Greyhound office at Los Angeles, from which the bus departed at 11:59 p.m., Wednesday, Eastbound for Denver, nor the bus driver carried identification for the passengers. The names of the victims were obtained from bits of personal effects which escaped the ravages of the flames.

Crash Unavoidable

"The engineer of the train, C.C. Davis, said when he realized the crash was unavoidable, he clapped on the - brakes and had slowed down to 38 miles an hour when his locomotive struck the stage. The train was partly derailed. Tourists and Indians from the near-by pueblo were the first to arrive on the scene. Ambulances arrived from Albuquerque and other nearby communities a half hour after the crash.

"Apparently the bus driver attempted to turn parallel with the track when he saw he could not beat the train to the crossing," said Davis, the engineer. "The locomotive sideswiped the bus and carried parts of it a half mile."

"Homer Stein, of San Francisco, and Conrad Heubers of Los Angeles, credited their escape to the fact that they were on the side of the bus opposite to that struck by the locomotive. Both said the driver, F. D. Williams of Albuquerque failed to stop, and merely slowed down at the crossing. Williams, a relief driver between Gallup and Albuquerque, was among those killed."

2 passengers died soon after the crash bringing the death total to 21. Crash investigators discovered that a woman passenger was sitting on F.D. Williams' lap at the time of the crash. Although the crash did not involve a Nite Coach, the publicity reflected poorly on Pickwick's Los Angeles operations.

In early 1930 Austin debuted the 53-passenger Pickwick Duplex Day Coach, which was largely an improved version of his 1928 Nite Coach Sleeper designed for standard intercity service. Historically the forerunner of General Motors' Scenicruiser, the Duplex was of semi-monocoque steel and Duralumin construction.

According to Autobody the principal structural members were 7-inch steel channels which extended along the lower outside edge of the coach tied together by 14 cross members of 4-inch seamless steel tubing forming a foundation to which the body framing and chassis were affixed. The heavy outside channels along the vehicles circumference also served as a guard rail, protecting the occupants of the coach from intrusion in the case of a collision.

Three additional steel and Duralumin channels ran along the entire length of the coach providing the upper and lower framework of the passenger windows which were fitted between pressed steel uprights that connected the 7-in. steel channel with the Duralumin upper framework. The vehicle's exterior was made up of double-walled Duralumin panels filled with Thermosote, a tar-impregnated wood fibre insulation.

The coach has a central aisle intermediate the two decks; single steps lead up and down into the 4-place compartments. Headroom over the center aisle was 85 inches except over the baggage compartment where it was reduced to 72 inches. The roof was composed of a central Duralumin backbone and framework covered by insulating board and a heavy nitrite-coated canvas cover.

As on the Nite Coach, the Duplex' front-mounted engine was built into a removable carrier frame which was fitted with either a Sterling Petrel or Hall-Scott 6-cylinder gasoline engines of between 150 and 175 h.p. Equipped with powerful air brakes, power was delivered to the rear wheels via a driveshaft that rode inside a 20 inch wide central isle which was made up of heavy 1/8 inch Duralumin plate. From the center aisle, steel uprights ran up to the roof forming a central framework to which the various compartment partitions and braces were attached. The resulting steel and Duralumin honeycomb resulted in a durable two story coach weighing little more than a standard single deck 33-passenger coach. The windows were made from shatterproof glass framed by composite Duralumin and Bakelite frames.

It is believed that a total of 40 Duplex coaches were built by Pickwick between 1930 and 1932. Eleven Duplex coaches were delivered to Pickwick-Greyhound’s Missouri operation in June and July of 1930, five with Sterling engines and six with Hall-Scott power. Three were assigned to the Denver-Salt Lake City run while the remaining eight saw service on the Kansas City-St. Louis route. In October, 1930 Pickwick-Greyhound’s Missouri Duplex coach operation came to an abrupt end when the state DOT outlawed oversized/overweight vehicles on the states roadways and the Duplexes were subsequently replaced by standard-sized Yellow Coaches. Pennsylvania Greyhound is also supposed to have used a few Duplex Day Coaches on its New York-Washington run.

The May 1930 issue of Autobody included a feature in the newly introduced Pickwick Duplex Day Coach:

"Pickwick’s Double-Deck Intercity Coach

"The first Pickwick 53-passenger Duplex day coach has been placed in service between San Francisco and San Jose, Calif. This new double-deck, intercity coach is the latest brain-child of Dwight E. Austin, designer of the famous Pickwick Nite coach and of other models embodying radical departure from conventional motorcoach construction. Austin not only designed the Duplex coach but is general manager of the new Pickwick Motor Coach Works at El Segundo, Calif., in which it was built. He came to the Pickwick organization in 1923 as
Two large dome lamps light the center aisle whose trunks can be loaded and afford storage space for two large space, accessible from either side through compartments… (missing text)

The baggage compartment behind the rear axle is 85 in. except over the rear-wheel housing. The headroom over the aisle is 85 in. except over the baggage compartment where it is 72 in. The drive shaft and other mechanical components and form a foundation to receive the body and chassis units. These heavy channels on the outside of the structure also form an extremely solid guard rail to protect the coach from accidents. Three additional channels of steel and Duralumin run the entire length of the coach above and below the windows. The uprights are of pressed steel, connected at the bottom to the 7-in. channel and at the top to Duralumin carlines. The inside and outside sheathing of the structure is of Duralumin; insulation being placed between this double-sheet wall. The central isle, 20 in. wide, is built above the lower floor level and is made of a 1/8-in. Duralumin plate running from the motor compartment to the rear-wheel housing. The headroom over the aisle is 85 in. except over the baggage compartment where it is 72 in. The drive shaft and other mechanical equipment going to the rear axle are carried under this aisle. From the aisle, uprights are carried at intervals connecting with the roof. These with the compartment partitions and braces make a type of honeycomb construction that is exceptional for its rigidity.

Baggage Stored In Coach

The baggage compartment behind the rear axle provides 284 cu. ft. of storage space, accessible from either side through doors 30 in. high and 40 in. wide. This affords storage space for two large suitcases per passenger, also for several trunks. The floor of this compartment being only 20 in. from the ground, heavy trunks can be loaded single-handed.

Two large dome lamps light the center aisle whose single steps lead up or down...
The October 1930 issue of Autobody announced the firm's move into their
field factory:
were in use on Pickwick-Greyhound's daily
rollings required by its constantly expanding
experience of Charles F. Wren, its president, as a practical bus operator,
the genius of Pickwick's brilliant young designer and engineer,
being engaged in coach construction and designing almost
since the inception of the company 18 years ago. Until about two years ago
Pickwick confined its coach-building activities to construction of rolling stock for
use on its own lines. In this, the company was eminently successful, due to the
experience of Charles F. Wren, its president, as a practical bus operator, and to
the genius of Pickwick's brilliant young designer and engineer, Dwight E. Austin.
Although lacking the facilities for turning out more than a small portion of the
rolling stock required by its constantly expanding system, the Pickwick company

“Seats are individual reclining chairs with the exception of five on the rear lounge,
two observation seats in the driving compartment and two folding seats in the
vestibule. The floor of this compartment is well insulated to prevent heating from
the motor and there is a large ventilator on each side of the front panel. There
are only 18 seats on the lower level, leaving 35 of the choice upper-deck seats.
Previous experience in operating these observation types of coaches has proved
these seats to be most desirable from the passenger's viewpoint it is said.

“Another feature of the general arrangement is that only 16 seats face the rear.
The remaining 37 passengers face in the direction in which the car is traveling.
The individual reclining seats are of Pickwick design and construction. They are
constructed chiefly of Duralumin, are quiet in operation and are deeply
upholstered in mohair. A mohair trimmed armrest is also provided for the aisle
seat passenger.

“All Windows Same Size

“Draped curtains are provided at all windows which are of the Pickwick sliding
type constructed of steel and Bakelite channels. All windows are exactly the same
size, are interchangeable and can be replaced from the outside. Portable tables
fit into special brackets in the compartments and can be used for card playing,
dining service, etc. In addition to the sliding windows, there are eight roof
ventilators. Heating is provided through 12 hot-water radiators, utilizing the water
from the motor-cooling system and if necessary the heat from the exhaust pipe;
thermostats are installed to prevent overheating of the motor or the coach. Fuel
equipment includes two 50-gal. gasoline tanks.”

The following article in the August 7, 1930 Greeley Daily Tribune indicated the Duplex coaches
were in use on Pickwick-Greyhound's daily Denver to Salt Lake City run:

“2-Deck Busses to Salt Lake thru Greeley

“Two Pickwick Duplex day coaches, with a capacity of more than 60 passengers,
are being operated thru Greeley twice daily on the Denver-Salt Lake City run. The
Duplex out of Denver arrives at 9:20 a.m., while the one from Salt Lake City is
due here at 9:40 a.m.

“These busses are by far the largest on regular schedule here. They have two
decks of seats. The driver sits on the upper deck level high above the huge 176-
horsepower Sterling motor with which the machine is equipped.

“The main aisle of the bus is above the floor of the lower deck. Passengers step
down to the lower deck and up to the upper deck. The elevator aisle is to permit
the propeller shaft of the bus to clear the body.

“Aluminum alloys used in the Pickwick Duplex day coach make it as light in
weight as the huge single deckers operated thru Greeley. Toilet facilities are
provided in the Duplex.

“This equipment is not to be confused with the night coach operated on some bus
lines. The Pickwick company builds the Duplex. Each Duplex carries a crew of
two, the driver and a conductor or courier.”

The October 1930 issue of Autobody announced the firm's move into their new $300,000 Mines
Field factory:

“New Plant of Pickwick Motor Coach Works by A.H. Reed

“The astounding growth of the motor coach industry during the last decade has
brought about revolutionary changes in design and construction of passenger
coaches. The long-haul passenger business, in which the motorcoach has
become a recognized factor in late years, inspired the development of special
types of buses capable of meeting the exacting requirements of this sort of travel.
In these coaches, wood has given way to metal, and mohair has in many
instances replaced leather for seating upholstering. Refinements have been
added in the form of forced-draft heating and ventilating systems, Thermos
drinking fountains, individual reading lights, and in some instances, lobbies and
even facilities for sleeping and dining.

“Outstanding among the leaders in the field of motor-coach operation and
construction in this country is the Pickwick Corporation. It was one of the pioneers
in development of this industry. Although concerned chiefly with the operation of
motorcoaches, Pickwick has engaged in coach construction and designing almost
since the inception of the company 18 years ago. Until about two years ago
Pickwick confined its coach-building activities to construction of rolling stock for
use on its own lines. In this, the company was eminently successful, due to the
experience of Charles F. Wren, its president, as a practical bus operator, and to
the genius of Pickwick’s brilliant young designer and engineer, Dwight E. Austin.
Although lacking the facilities for turning out more than a small portion of the
rolling stock required by its constantly expanding system, the Pickwick company
announced the launch of the new Nite Coach service in May of
them for
they were sold to the
Columbia Pacific went bankrupt in 1935 and the route
Trail System Nite Coach and Santa Fe Trailways Sleeper Coach.
coach in four
photograph gives a late 1932 date,
Pickwick Motor Coach Works or by Columbia
sold to the Wren's Columbia Pacific Nite Coach Line.
Ten were purchased by the Pacific Greyhound
Coach's construction in the new Columbia Coach
purchased the necessary tooling from Pickwick's receiver and
As Pacific Greyhound had already committed to purchasing the new coach,
Wren likely purchased the necessary tooling from Pickwick's receiver and completed the remaining Nite Coach's construction in the new Columbia Coach Works facility.
Both Columbia Pacific Nite Coach Lines and Columbia Coach Works were named in recognition of the Columbia Finance Co., a newly formed holding company controlled by Wren that held a controlling stake in both firms.

Dwight E. Austin did not join Wren in the Columbia enterprise, electing instead to produce his own 21-passenger city transit bus, the Austin Utility Coach, in Pickwick's former Mines Field factory which he leased from Pickwick's receiver, C.A. Sheedy.

What is known is that at least eighteen of the bread-box-style Nite Coaches were constructed. Ten were purchased by the Pacific Greyhound Line while the remaining eight coaches were sold to the Wren's Columbia Pacific Nite Coach Line. Whether they were constructed by Pickwick Motor Coach Works or by Columbia Coach Works remains unclear. At least one photograph gives a late 1932 date, although most state 1933 or later. Pictures exist of the coach in four liveries, Columbia Pacific Nite Coach Lines, Pacific Greyhound Line, Sante Fe Trail System Nite Coach and Santa Fe Trailways Sleeper Coach.

Columbia Pacific went bankrupt in 1935 and the route was taken over by the Burlington Line. The new owners elected to replace the two-year-old coaches with more cost-effective units so they were sold to the recently established Sante Fe Trailways Stage Line, who refurbished them for use on its daily Kansas City to Los Angeles run. Sante Fe's president, A.E. Greenleaf, announced the launch of the new Nite Coach service in May of 1935:

"On May 27th (1935), a new, standard will be set in motorcoach transportation; according to A. E. Greenleaf, Vice-President of Santa Fe Trail System; America's largest individually owned and managed bus transportation company. On that date, Nite Coach highway sleeper service will be inaugurated between Kansas City and Los Angeles over the historic Old Santa Fe Trail.

"At a cost of over $20,000 each new Nite Coach will bring new travel comfort to the highway,' said Mr. Greenleaf. 'These coaches are luxurious parlor cars by day and have, sleeping accommodations for 25 persons by night. The berths are
Besides his work for Twin Coach - which involved seat design in addition to HVAC and other.

The 1941 Paramount film Sullivan's Travels includes a thinly disguised 1933 Columbia Nite Coach. The Preston Sturges comedy stars Joel McCrea as John L. Sullivan, a young Hollywood director fresh from a string of profitable, yet shallow comedies who want to make a serious film depicting the plight of the downtrodden American.

Mr. Lebrand, the studio chief (played by Robert Warwick) refuses, demanding that Sullivan deliver another comedy. The idealistic Sullivan refuses and embarks on a tour of the country disguised as a hobo in order to get a first-hand taste of the sorrows of humanity.

Sullivan's butler and valet trail Sullivan in a studio-supplied touring bus to ensure that their employer and star director make it back to Hollywood in one piece. The vehicle they use to trail Sullivan is the 1933 Columbia Nite Coach, fitted with a pair of hideous grills – front and rear – in order to disguise its true origin.

When Dwight E. Austin went to work for General Motors in 1934 he abandoned the Utility Coach project and the vacant Pickwick Motor Coach Works plant was sold by C.A. Sheedy, Pickwick's receiver, for $30,000 to Los Angeles attorney Harry Elliott. During the next decade (1934-1943) Austin served as a lead engineer in the General Motors coach division.

A single Austin Utility Coach is known to have survived the scrap metal drives of World War II. Purchased in East L.A. for $400 and converted into a motor home by Pat Patterson and family in 1948, the 1933 Utility Coach survived at least into the mid 50s before it was scrapped.

In 1934 Austin went to work for General Motors' Yellow Truck & Coach Division as a lead engineer in their motor coach engineering department. Although he is better known for his Pickwick Duplex and Nite Coaches he also helped develop several popular Yellow Coaches of the thirties, one of which was the 1935 Model 719 'Super Coach'.

In hiring Austin General Motors also received the rights to his 1932 angle drive patent which was used in one form or another on the vast majority of Yellow's pusher type buses from the mid thirties onward. Austin's angle drive first appeared on the rear-engined 1932 Pickwick / 1933 Columbia bread box-style Nite Coaches of which 18 examples are thought to have been built.

He parted ways with Charles F. Wren, Pickwick's owner, in late 1932 (or early 1933) establishing his own coach manufacturing company, Austin Utility Coach, in Pickwick's former Mines Field factory. The Depressions was not the best time to start your own manufacturing business and after building a handful of the 22-passenger mid-sized city transit buses, Austin threw in the towel in early 1934, accepting the job with General Motors.

Part of the deal involved the licensing of Austin's angle drive patent to GM, which had apparently been working on a similar system for quite some time. Austin's system proved to be the superior design and was used by Yellow Coach on all of its subsequent pusher coaches.

Austin's drive allowed a bus engine to be placed transversely across the back of a vehicle. It consisted of a set of gears that redirected the transmissions output shaft 90 degrees forward - 45 degrees at the transmission, 45 degrees at the axle - allowing power to be transmitted to an offset differential housed at the back of the vehicle's rear drive axle.

Two main advantages were gained by the use of Austin's system, it allowed for greater utilization of the available space and the engine's longitudinal placement at the very rear of the coach permitted easier access to the engine for maintenance and replacement operations. The only downside besides the additional cost and weight of the unit, was a loss in efficiency necessitated by routing the engine through an additional set of gears.

When Austin first moved to Yellow Coach, he joined the General's efforts to perfect the platform-type integral construction he had pioneered while working at Pickwick. One of his first efforts was the model 1935 Model 719 Yellow Coach, which was designed for Greyhound, an important customer at that time as it was partially owned by General Motors. With its transverse pusher engine, high passenger level and underfloor luggage compartments, the 'Super Coach' is considered by many to be the first truly modern interstate coach and its basic layout continues to be used today, three quarters of a century later.

1943 issue of Bus Transportation:

"Dwight Austin, well-known bus designer, now heads up Dwight Austin & Associates, Inc. with headquarters in Kent, Ohio. Mr. Austin has recently obtained a commission to cooperate on the new designs for postwar production by Twin Coach Co. He was the principle factor in the designing and building of coaches for the Pickwick Corporation where he later became vice president and general manager. In 1933 he resigned from the Pickwick Corporation to build Austin Utilities coaches under the name of Austin System. The Utilities coaches attracted much attention due to their light weight and modern design, and the Yellow Truck & Coach Co. brought the designer to their plant as new development engineer. He resigned this position on March 31, 1943."

Besides his work for Twin Coach - which involved seat design in addition to HVAC and other.
mechanical systems. Austin found his innovative seating ideas were well received by the railroad industry. During the 40s and 50s large numbers of railroad passengers sat in Austin-designed transformable seating systems and slept in Austin-designed sleeping compartments which featured his patented ‘Slumber Foam Foundation’.

Two well-known customers were the Santa Fe and Canadian Pacific railroads whose passenger cars included fixed and transformable stainless steel upholstered seating designed by Austin. His consulting firm, Dwight Austin & Associates, was located in Ken, Ohio's former Erie Railroad carshops at 600 Mogadore Rd. Sharing the facility was Dwight Austin Products Co., a manufacturing firm that built railroad furniture as well as a line of institutional furniture similar to the products offered by Herman Miller.

After Austin passed away in March of 1960, the railroad seating division of Dwight Austin Products Co. was acquired by Adams & Westlake, the Elkhart, Indiana manufacturer of Adlake dining and business car railroad seating and breather windows.

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