



# TOP 10 SCHOOL BUS COMPANIES



Throughout the years, the task of making the best buses for school transportation has been handled by various companies.

This article features 10 school bus companies which made a name for themselves, when it came to redefining the way we look at a school bus.

## **#1 WAYNE CORPORATION**

Topping our list of companies is Wayne Corporation. Though the company declared itself bankrupt and discontinued operation in 1992, the Wayne Corporation had played a vital role in the development of safe buses for school children.

They were the first and foremost to introduce the concept of school buses for schools.

Their innovation predates the famous yellow coloured buses which are widely used these days.

They introduced the horse drawn carts, including kid hacks, which later evolved into automobiles which used full metal body chassis.

Wayne Corporation introduced guard rails on the sides of all school buses, inboard wheelchair lifts, and even high-headroom doors.

They were the first with a school bus based upon a cutaway van chassis, the Wayne Busette.

This chassis design is still one of the most popular in North American markets even after more than 35 years.

## **#2 BLUE BIRD**

An all time giant, the Blue Bird Corporation (formerly called Blue Bird Body Company) is clearly one of the top school bus manufacturing companies even today. Blue Bird's corporate headquarters and main manufacturing facilities are in Georgia.

It was in 1937 that the company began production of full-steel bus bodies.

This innovation would soon replace the wooden bodies which were commonly used in the United States.

The yellow colour for school buses was proposed by a Blue Bird engineer in a 1939 conference and is still in use today.

### **#3 GILLIG CORPORATION**

What began as a carriage and wagon shop in 1890 in San Francisco, California soon became a pioneer in school bus designs.

In 1920, Gillig Corporation which was then called Gillig Bros. created and patented the "California Top" roof design which most of the buses use even today.

From manufacturing automobile, hearse, truck, and bus bodies, Gillig Corporation went on to become almost entirely dedicated to the production of school buses by 1957.

They were also instrumental in designing the diesel-powered rear-engine transit style school bus.

Gillig produced the 855-D with a passenger capacity of 97 which were the highest-capacity school bus to be ever produced.

## **#4 WARD BODY WORKS**

The company was established in 1933 in Conway, Arkansas and was well known for manufacturing bus body parts.

In the 1960s, Ward School Bus Manufacturing, Inc, a subsidiary of Ward Body Works used various updates that modernized manufacturing and production.

During the 1970s, Ward became one of the largest school bus body manufacturers in the United States.

They had a 25% market share in 1973. Just like most school bus manufacturing companies, the glory days of the Ward body works came to an end in the 1970s and the company filed for bankruptcy in July, 1980.

An investment group assisted by the then-Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton were involved in purchasing the assets of Ward Industries. In 1981, Ward was officially renamed AmTran.

## **#5 AMTRAN**

A successor to Ward Body Works, the AmTran or American Transport Corporation headquarters and manufacturing facilities were also located in Conway, Arkansas. In 1987, AmTran introduced an extra rub rail right below the window line.

They specialized in manufacturing of type A, C and D buses. In 1999, AmTran made plans for a new facility in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The company was re-branded as International, then IC in 2003 after being purchased by Navistar International in 1995.

## **#6 IC BUSES**

IC specializes in school buses, shuttle buses, multi-function school activity buses (MFSABs), and commercial transit buses derived from their school bus designs.

IC or Integrated Coach is the name given because the bus body, engine, chassis and are all produced within a single corporate structure.

Initially the name was IC which was later changed to IC buses in 2009. The year 2010 was marked by the launch of IC's largest bus and also introduced its smallest one.

IC buses are one of the modern giants and have turned their attention to manufacturing rear-engine transit-style buses since January 2011.

## **#7 THOMAS BUILT BUSES**

Thomas Built Buses, Inc commonly called Thomas is an American bus manufacturer operating in High point, North Carolina.

In 1936, Thomas stopped the production of its streetcars which were a trend back then and opened a new frontier in school bus manufacturing.

By the 1970s, Thomas Car Works was one of the most dominant manufacturers of school buses in North America and in 1972 the company adopted its current name Thomas Built Buses.

Thomas was the first to design and manufacture its own school bus chassis for both its front and rear-engine models before any of its competition.

As the economic turmoil hit America, the company began to downscale manufacturing.

In 1980, a smaller school bus on a cutaway van chassis was designed. This went on to become a popular model and is still in production.

By the end of the 20th century Thomas was one of the only three principal builders of large school buses in the United States.

## **#8 CARPENTER BODY WORKS**

Though the company was founded in Mitchell, Indiana in 1919, they produced their first bus in 1923. Produced Type A, B, C, and D buses.

The Company initially was known to build hauling wagons for two cement factories and gradually began building "kid hacks" that were horse drawn, with wooden benches to carry children to school.

Carpenter's first true school bus was built wholly of wood and later on combinations of steel and wood replaced this all-wood construction.

In 1935, a change was made and all-steel bodied buses were made. Carpenter's conventional-style school bus (the Classic) underwent body revisions in 1984 and 1986.

Carpenter Body Company was one of the big 6 in the school bus manufacturing industry.

But like the rest of the companies, economic meltdown affected them badly and in May 2001, Carpenter was shut down by Spartan Motors, its parent company.

## **#9 COLLINS INDUSTRIES**

Located in Hutchinson, Kansas, the company specializes in manufacturing of Type A school buses, along with ambulances and other special-purpose vehicles.

The company was founded in 1971 and by 1998 it comprised of four subsidiaries: Collins Bus Corporation, Capacity of Texas Inc, World Trans Inc. and Wheeled Coach Industries Inc.

Collins went on to purchase Mid Bus in 1998 and the assets of Canada-based manufacturer Corbeil Bus Corporation in 2007. The company has about 900 employees across three manufacturing facilities.

Collins Industries was later purchased by American Industrial Partners.

In 2010, AIP combined Collins with Fleetwood Enterprises, Halcore Group, and E-One to form Allied Specialty Vehicles.

## **#10 WAYNE WHEELED WHEELS**

It is a trade name given to a division of vehicle manufacturers who specializes primarily in production of school bus.

In late 1992, Harsco Corporation purchased the rights to use the Wayne brand name, product rights, as well as parts and tooling during the liquidation of assets of the Wayne Corporation that took place in late 1992.

The BMY Division of Harsco operated WWV (Wayne Wheeled Vehicles) from an assembly facility at Marysville, Ohio, where military trucks were also assembled.

School bus production began there in 1993 and ended in early 1995. The economic meltdown led to the close of entire operations and the property was vacated.

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