Country Coach

The Oregon RV (recreational vehicle) industry has its beginning in 1968, when Bob Lee and three other young entrepreneurs established Caribou Manufacturing in Junction City. In 1973, Lee left Caribou to found Country Campers. The company started making mini-motor homes the next year, and by 1983 a hundred employees were manufacturing and marketing rear-engine, diesel, luxury motor homes.

Over the next twenty years, the company grew quickly, changing its name in 1987 from Country Campers to Country Coach, Inc. It developed its own chassis, the DynoMax, and added buildings and staff. By 2004, Country Coach had 1,600 employees and a 508,000-square-foot campus in Junction City. Its luxury vehicles—known as motorcoaches—came in a variety of series and floor plans, ranging in length from 34 to 45 feet and retailing for several hundred thousand dollars.

Country Coach—together with the larger Monaco Coach Corporation and the smaller Marathon—is part of the RV industry that at its height employed 4,600 workers in Lane County. It also supported many other businesses, which provided paint, metal parts, upholstery, and electronics.

In 1996, National RV Holdings bought Country Coach, but the company suffered as its new parent company lost value amid declining RV demand. Country Coach was bought in 2007 by a private investment consortium that included founder Bob Lee, and CEO Jay Howard led a 50 percent downsizing of the company. A further decline in RV sales—33 percent nationally in 2008—presented another significant challenge to Oregon's motorcoach industry, which is sensitive to both the price of fuel and to consumer credit. Country Coach reorganized under Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection and laid off more than 450 workers. In April 2009, the company reopened with a staff of about 100 employees.

Written by Edwin Battistella

Further Reading:

"RVs in Oregon." *The Register-Guard* (Eugene, OR), January 11 2009, D29.

Barry, Dan. "Where Jobs Ride on a Luxury on Wheels." *New York Times*, March 30, 2009.

Christie, Tim. "RV job losses will have major impact on local economy." *The Register-Guard* (Eugene, OR), Mar 4, 2009, pg. A.1.

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