

New SEMTA buses state of the art

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(Wb.T.S.F.Ro)5A

By TIM RICHARD

Bob Truxell did more than produce a new bus this week. Truxell, of Bloomfield Hills, is general manager of GMC Truck & Coach in Pontiac. On Tuesday, the first of 189 new buses—the first redesigned vehicles since 1959—rolled off his assembly lines for the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority and Detroit's Department of Transportation.

Not only were SEMTA and D-DOT officials pleased, but Truxell is confident the RTS-2 his plant produced is better than the "Transbus" being considered as a standard by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

SEMTA General Manager Larry E. Salci, of Troy, agrees. So does Dan Morrill, of West Bloomfield, Salci's assistant.

TRANSBUS, which exists only as a prototype, would have a ramp for wheelchair users to board. Truxell, Salci and Morrill all say it's impractical. Here's why:

The Transbus ramp is six feet long. The bus floor is 18 inches from the ground. A person in a wheelchair on a six-inch curb would have to ascend 12 inches in a distance of six feet.

"That's a one-inch rise for every six inches. I tried it, and it's h-a-a-a-rd," said Truxell.

The situation gets worse if there is no curb, such as in SEMTA's park-and-ride pickups in suburban parking lots or on curbside mile roads in the suburbs. There, the wheelchair user would have to rise 18 inches over a dis-

tance of six feet, or one inch vertically for every four inches horizontally.

In contrast, GMC's offering will use a hydraulic lift at the rear door. It will have locks to hold the wheelchair in place so that it doesn't roll when the bus is on a hill.

"With individual front-end suspension," said Truxell, "these buses will have a better ride and less maintenance. Everything is very corrosion resistant."

In addition, those used in Detroit, where city buses carry schoolchildren, will have fiber glass seats that can't be slashed and are virtually graffiti-proof. Acrylic side panels will also resist graffiti.

With welds instead of joints, the GMC bus will have fewer, if any, squeaks as it ages. Truxell hesitated about guaranteeing the number of years the new buses would last.

But Salci said he hoped their life would be 15 years. Currently, the federal government funds replacement vehicles when buses reach 12 years.

The new buses will cost about \$91,000 for D-DOT and \$96,000 for SEMTA, Salci said. Transbus' pricing, although the vehicle is not in production, is projected to be between \$125,000 and \$135,000, he added.

ONE INTERESTING feature is that the bus will "kneel" to receive passengers. When the bus stops, the driver uses a compressed air device that makes the right front end dip several inches to reduce the height boarders must climb.

Windows are tinted and acrylic and

will resist impacts better. Contour seats extend from the wall, so there will be no floor legs to trip over.

ALTOGETHER, the 189 new buses will cost \$18.2 million. D-DOT will get 111 and SEMTA 78.

Funding is 80 per cent federal, 20 per cent state and local.

SEMTA's contingent will be divided equally, 26 each, between the Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties terminals.

The entire group should be on the streets by mid-July. They roll off the assembly lines at the rate of about one an hour.

Most will be replacement buses for older buses in the SEMTA fleet. The first buses will not be equipped with wheelchair lifts, but the final 57 will have them.

They're the first new SEMTA buses to be received since November of 1975. Controversies over bus standards, at both the federal and state levels, have held up bus production.

"We are well aware," said Salci "of the frustration of knowing what is needed and being unable to satisfy the demand."

"They're the first advance design vehicles to meet the Urban Mass Transportation Administration's specifications, and the first buses in the country to utilize safety reflective stripes on the sides and backs. The pressure sensitive reflective stripes were developed by SEMTA and 3-M Co. and will provide greater night visibility for the vehicles."



The new SEMTA and D-DOT buses are General Motors' RTS-2 model, which stands for "rapid transit series 2."

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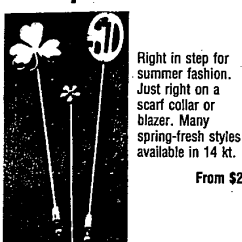
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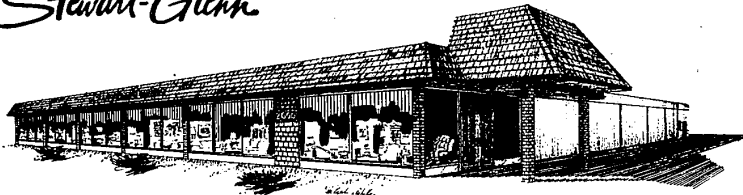
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