HISTORY OF SAFARI MOTOR HOME 1987 – 2001

By Brian Wigzell

THE TREK

I thought it best to assign the ‘Trek’ to a chapter on its own. Though its lineage is interwoven in the early Safari history and will be mentioned from time to time in other chapters, it deserves to stand alone, if for no other reason than its uniqueness. I am not sure that I can do the Trek coach justice here, but am not really concerned as the Trek clubs have produced more information for their members on their specific coaches than I could ever hope to do. So, Trek owners stick with your clubs! This article is primarily an overview for all Safari coach owners. If, perchance I please the Trek owners, then I am flattered.

My knowledge of the Trek coaches was very limited when I started this history & my first thought was to omit the Trek. That, of course, would have been a terrible mistake on my part. I then set about researching the Trek & in talking with a number of Trek owners, who offered me immense help in putting together this most important chapter in the Safari coach history. Specifically, I would like to thank Penny Braden who steered me to the NW Trek clubs website WWW.NWTFC.COM where I was able to extract so much information on the various Trek models & the excellent photos, many of which I reproduce in this article. I would recommend anyone reading this article that needs more information than I am giving here to go onto that website as it is a history on Trek coaches in itself. Also I owe thanks to the late Judy Yeast for her permission to reproduce the introduction to this chapter, “How the Bed Began”. I also cannot forget to thank other Trek owners for their help.

The first Trek emerged from Harrisburg in 1991, as a 1992 model, however I received the information that told me it was Mat Perlot’s intention to build the Trek back in 1987, before the first Safari coach was built! The dealers of the time convinced Mat that the market wasn’t ready for such a coach! I received from the late Judy Yeast in the following article she wrote titled “How the Bed Began”, this, I think, explains a lot about Mat & his conceptual ideas about the Trek.

“How the Bed Began”

“Mat Perlot, known for his “out of the box” thinking decided in the mid-1980’s that there were lots of younger drivers who wanted smaller vehicles that included the high quality of larger RV’s. He studied some of the space saving features of class C coaches. The flip down bed impressed him and it seemed the ceiling would be a great place to store it when it was not in use.

Mat felt so strongly his ideas would work that he started the Safari Motor Coach Corporation to implement them. Mat’s first project was to build a small coach for weekend use that he could sell in high numbers.
The year was 1987 & the first Trek version had chrome poles to raise & lower the bed. It was a disappointment. Dealers did not support the idea because they could not see the value thus only two or three were sold.

Safari went on to build high quality regular RV’s, but the engineers kept the idea of a bed in the ceiling alive. They prototyped linear activators, air & hydraulic cylinders, & thought about cables activated by cylinders, but nothing was quite right.

The breakthrough came from an unexpected place. Mat & his wife Connie took a few days vacation in Las Vegas. After checking into their hotel room, Mat idly picked up the TV remote & noticed two unusual buttons: TV UP, TV DOWN.?? What were these for?

He pushed TV UP…Rumm.. Up came the TV out of a credenza!

TV DOWN button…Rumm..Down went the TV into its hiding place.

This could be the kind of motor & design he needed! To test the motor, Mat had Connie move the TV up & down while he sat on it. It worked. Next, he had Connie push the UP button while he tried to hold the TV down. He couldn’t hold it. The motor was strong enough to carry the load of a Trek bed! Finally, he opened up the back of the cabinet to find out who made the motor. Back in Harrisburg, he returned to his original concept. This time he had an idea for an improved design. Safari found Somfy, a company that made motors capable of lifting the bed. Then they contracted with Hurds, a fabricator in Harrisburg who could “build anything”. Hurds helped solve the load carrying problems.

The new Trek coach was introduced in 1991 with the bed in the ceiling. Safari had a fresh new approach to an RV. They worked out new ideas for getting dealers behind the Trek concept. Treks started selling – but not exactly as the factory had foreseen.

We’ve all heard the stories of how a product’s primary use ends up to be far different from what the designer planned. Edison thought his phonograph would only be used for business dictation & didn’t think about recording music; IBM envisioned a worldwide market of between ten & twelve mainframe computers, then went on to sell thousands that today business could not function without.

So it was with the Trek. Safari thought that this small RV with its unique bed would be used mainly for weekend trips. However, right from the beginning, a surprising number of people started using the Trek full-time, & even more used it for extended time periods.

Trekkies were the Trek ownership took on club-like status. Owners became “Trekkies”, proud of their coaches, its quality construction, and the places it could take them. They had a 35 foot motor home in a 28 foot body. The Trek is unique in the industry & unique in its inception. Mat took a gamble when he built a coach with a fresh approach and the capital of gambling, Las Vegas, helped provide answers to critical design problems.

The 1992 model year Treks came in three lengths 24, 26 & 28 feet. The 26 & 28 feet coaches had double
or twin bed options, while the 24 & one model of the 28 foot relied solely on the 'Electro-Majic' bed as the main sleeping quarters.

1992 TREK

The 1993 Trek came on the same chassis etc. & in the three length floor plans 24, 26 & 28 feet as the previous 1992 model.

1993 TREK
The following pictures come from the 1993 Trek brochure.
Here you clearly see the same classic interior that Safari used on its other coaches.

The 1994 model Treks made no changes in chassis, engine, etc. and had the same three lengths as previous years. They maintained the twin bed options on the 2600 & 2800 models. They also offered the same in a Pathmaker Edition that came with a patio awning, 1000 watt inverter, solar panel, hydraulic levelers, a 120 volt residential lighting package, and air horns.

Without a doubt, the Trek was a unique coach and could fully compete in the luxury coach market. Additionally, its characteristic Electro-Majic bed was used in another Safari coach, the Kalahari. This coach was introduced as a 1993 model lightweight coach and came in 30 & 33 foot lengths. It offered either a standard rear bed layout or Electro-Majic’ bed option that was up front over the driver and co-pilot seats. I will deal with this coach in more detail in another part of this series and as
you may see, could be the reason for the major change in the Trek philosophy in adding longer rear bedroom and rear engine models.

The Trek philosophical change came with the 1995 model year. This same year saw the end of the Isuzu chassis/engine configuration. This practical and philosophical change was probably driven by the new chassis options that had been introduced by Chevrolet. They unveiled the then new P30 & P72 chassis. With these chassis came the 454 V8 gas engines which generated 230HP and the 6.5 litre V8 diesel which developed 190HP. Both engines were coupled to the GM 4L80E, 4 speed w/OD transmission. The Treks built on the front engine P30 chassis came in three lengths, 24, 28, and 30 feet. The P72 chassis used the rear fitted 6.5L diesel engine, coupled to an Allison 542, 4 speed w/OD transmission giving coach lengths of 30 and 33 feet. Here we see a direct clash with the Kalahari coach models, both seeking the same market!

The 'Pathmaker Edition' was available again this year on all models, as well as an arctic package which consisted of dual-pane windows, heated, remote controlled mirrors, heated and insulated holding tanks plus auxiliary defrosting fans. I have often wondered how many of the rear engine Treks were made as they appear to be quite rare. Safari also gave this 1995 Trek a modified front cap with much wider radiator grill keeping the design very similar to its Serengeti/Sahara stable mates.
These pictures are part of the multi-page brochure for the 1995 Trek.
October 1994 advertisement carried in the FMCA magazine of the same month.

Apart from the interior & exterior colour changes, there were very few changes to the 1996 & 1997 Trek models.
The December issue of the SMC magazine *Rendezvous*, published a review of the 1996 24 foot Trek, floor plan 2430. As usual the article was well written by Don Magary. Unfortunately, Don did not report on any road test that may have taken place. The test coach was powered by the front mounted GM 6.5L turbo diesel engine with the usual GM 4L80E Hydramatic transmission. Don confirms the various chassis/engine combinations, including the rear engine versions. The 1996 Treks were the first of their type to have contoured molded skirt doors giving the coach a more luxurious exterior look.

Though the 1996 and 1997 Trek brochures carried floor plans for the rear-bed coaches, all of the FMCA magazine Trek advertisements showed only the 24 foot & 28 foot models. I have not found any information regarding the longer, rear-engine Trek coaches.


The following full page advertisement of the 1996 Trek appeared in the November 1996 issue of the FMCA magazine.
Though there were very few changes other than interior & exterior colors in the 1997 coaches I have shown below the eight floor plans, including two with optional front entry & the same model year spec sheet.
We now arrive at the 1998 model year Treks where we see a number of changes. It was here that Safari reduced the Trek line back to three floor plans, two 24 foot and one 28 foot. Gone are the rear engine and rear bedroom coaches. We have arrived where we began with the 1992 models, albeit with one extra 24 foot model. The big difference of course is in the chassis where the Trek now uses the Chevrolet P-32 exclusively. One does have a choice of the 454 CID Vortec gasoline engine or the 6.5L GM diesel. Both of the engines use the GM Hydromantic 4L80E four speed w/OD transmissions. To the layman, the Trek coach wasn’t really changing from year to year. Safari was adding various options each year. This year, 1998, a Datron Mobile Satellite System & a Delco Telepath GPS Navigator system were offered.
Cover photo of 1998 Trek brochure.
The chassis specifications for the 1999 Trek did not change, neither did the number and length of models. However, there was considerable change made on the
exterior. Gone was the usual riveted aluminum skin. In its place was a very smooth laminated skin that was still aluminum. There were interior décor changes, a lower profile, and engine covers were used.

Unfortunately I do not have any pictures or information on the 2000 model year Trek coaches. Though, I believe, other than exterior and interior colors, there were minimal changes.

I cannot say the same for the 2001 model Trek, for as you see below, a major exterior change had taken place.

![2001 Trek, photo from 2001 brochure.](image)

The most noticeable change is, of course, the front cap, now streamlined and very much updated. I am not sure whether or not the same rear cap was used. The smooth aluminum skin was laminated, as is now the norm on Trek coaches. Four different interior décor selections were available. The 20 inch front television was now centered above the dash instead off to the left side. The usual two 24 foot and one 28 foot floor plans were available as was the P32 chassis. Now the Workhorse name becomes attached. The engine options were also as in previous Treks. Tank capacities were the same as was wheelbases and GVWR.

This was the last Trek model year to be built by SMC because in July 2001 the merger of SMC and Monaco took place. This was not the end of the Trek story. As of April 2008 the coach continues to be built by Monaco Coach. I sincerely hope that this unique motor home continues to satisfy its owners & remains in production,
proving once again, that Mat Perlot's vision of this niche market coach was accurate. A good picture to end the Trek article:

This picture is from the last SMC Trek in 2001.