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# SABOA BUS

VEHICLE OF COMMUNICATION OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN BUS OPERATORS ASSOCIATION



**Marcopolo**



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# 2019

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# SABOA

Southern African Bus Operators Association

*voice of the bus & coach industry*

# Seeking safe, secure scholar transport

**A**DVICE issued by the Nelson Mandela Bay police department – after a taxi licensed to carry 16 passengers was stopped with 48 passengers and the driver aboard – was for parents to assess the safety of pupils’ transportation, to not allow their children to board a visibly overloaded vehicle and to ensure that the driver possesses the requisite licence to transport children. While the outcome of this incident was benign, there have been horrendous accidents with devastating consequences.

Perhaps, instead of doling out trite advice, the solution lies in providing

families with safe, efficient, reliable and affordable ways to get to school. The South African education system is notoriously imbalanced, and the lack of access to safe transport that consequently forces scholars either into unacceptably long on-foot journeys or into rickety and downright dangerous vehicles compounds the problem.

Brazil’s Caminho da Escola initiative has had exceptional results. The federal government’s ‘Pathway to School’ initiative supports the purchase of vehicles for the transport of basic education pupils in remote areas to renew the fleet, provide

safe transport and reduce dropout rates. One of the programme’s innovations was to make financing accessible from the National Bank for Economic and Social Development. Buses are standardised, suitable for rural use, certified, and renewable after a decade. Loans can be paid in up to six years, with a six-month grace period and low interest rate.

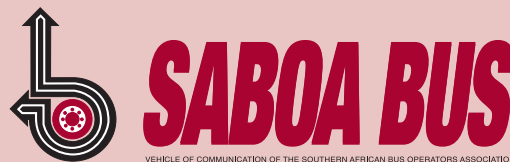
It’s useless closing the stable door after the horse has bolted: it’s time to implement sound solutions, perhaps taking a leaf from Brazil’s book.

Cindy Haler, Editor

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# Marcopolo kicks it up a notch with new products and vision

By Cindy Haler

Marcopolo has unquestionably earned its South African credentials, having established a 23 year track record, during which it has continuously invested in local production and content. The manufacturer has unveiled three important product innovations and announced a strategy to further embed itself in the local landscape

**M**ARCOPOLO recently unveiled three key product enhancements as well as a strategic push to partner with operators for the duration of vehicles' lifespan.

The body builder unveiled the next generation of its Torino commuter and city body, featuring new complete body structure (design and material), aluminium side panels, new, lighter parcel shelves which offer easier accessibility for passengers, new bonnet and dash, new front dome and headlights, new rear dome and tail lights, and new material colours.

The venerable Andare semilux benefited from a facelift, emerging as the Andare 1000 FL, with new front dome and headlights, new rear dome and tail lights, new bonnet and dash, and new material colours.

The Paradiso coach range was also facelifted, with enhancements including new LED headlights, front grille with stainless steel finish, new front and rear bumper, new stairway lights and material colours, new design on roof fibre, new stainless steel finish on sides, new external mirror, new engine door and brand identification, and new seat design.

Marcopolo SA GM Mikel Ecenarro says facelifts are applied to established

product ranges which stand to benefit from rejuvenation. Working with existing structure and concept, changes are predominantly on aesthetics – ranging from design, to materials.

In the case of a generation change, the design process starts from scratch and is built on a firm grasp of the range's evolution and operators' requirements. The Torino's reliability, durability, strength and robustness were retained,

but design was updated and tare mass reduced – with the weight saving from G6 to G7 enabling up to four extra passengers to be carried. Design changes ensure the vehicle is lighter but also more robust, says Ecenarro, with improved, stronger material used in design offering greater resistance to corrosion and resistance to fatigue.

Marcopolo is also looking to boost the 92% local content level it has



From left: ambassador Nedilson (Ambassador of Brazil to South Africa), Francisco Gomes (Marcopolo CEO), Mikel Ecenarro (General Manger, Marcopolo South Africa) and MinisterCounsellor Felipe Bandeira de Mello from the Brazilian Embassy



achieved in the G6 Torino, with a strategy of 'verticalisation' playing a key role. "One of the requirements in terms of the design and development of the G7 was verticalisation, in which production of an increased number of parts will be brought under Marcopolo's roof," says Ecenarro. As well as giving Marcopolo greater control of more parts and part quality, this also provides the advantage of being able to build and deliver to production lines as required.

While 'just in time' principles have long governed production, this has hinged on procuring parts from outside suppliers or from Marcopolo Brazil. Now the focus has shifted to holding raw material at the Germiston assembly facility and building in accordance with the demands of the production schedule. The company has invested in the machinery, tools and jigs to facilitate this change. As well as improving working capital by honing stores holdings, another benefit of the shift is the creation of local job opportunities.

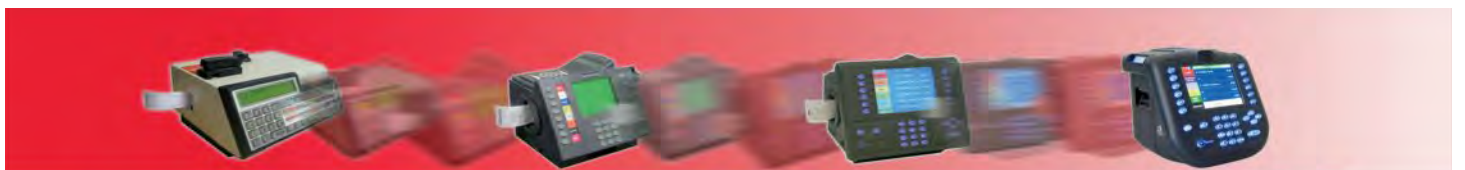
Production will continue uninterrupted as Marcopolo phases out the G6 Torino and switches to G7, with a brief period of consolidation prior to resuming full production. Although the factory has the capacity for 1 500 units a year, the current pace of production is between 2 and 2,2 buses a day, in line with market volumes. Although the new offerings are available – and the Torino has moved through the development and industrialization process to series



production – Ecenarro emphasises that Marcopolo is not racing to market and is content to bed down the new products.

The facelifted and new generation

products were launched in grand style, however, with Marcopolo hosting customers and dealers from an array of countries, chassis OEMs and the media



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at an event at its Germiston premises that recreated the warmth and sociability for which Brazil is renowned.

It was the biggest launch in Marcopolo SA's 23-year history here – and Ecenarro states that the anchor role the Torino plays meant that a generation change warranted a big splash. In addition to emphasising the investment Marcopolo has made in South Africa in establishing the factory (the facility covers 43 000 m<sup>2</sup>, with 18 000 m<sup>2</sup> under-roof and a 290-strong workforce), the event was intended to highlight the OEM's track record here, along with the long view: "Marcopolo has been here for 23 years and is here for the long term: Marcopolo has invested here and believes in the market."

In addition, it was an opportunity to enable the local market to interact with top Marcopolo management, whose attendance was also a nod to the importance of the South African operation in the Marcopolo network.

Apart from launching new products and showcasing its factory, the event also saw Ecenarro outlining Marcopolo SA's 'Vision 2022', detailing the pillars on which the strategy is based as well as what customers can expect from the OEM. "Marcopolo strives to be innovative not only in products but also in devising new services and solutions. The idea is to be able to partner with our customer operators during the full lifecycle of the bus – we don't just send them off with the vehicle keys and a warranty."

The move towards forging a close partnership with customers and continuing to offer value throughout vehicle lifespan mirrors a global trend, notes Ecenarro.

"The core business of operators is not to maintain buses: it's to operate them in the most efficient way, capture new end-users, fight for new permits, expand the markets and – ultimately – create a transportation experience.

"Why not partner with the bus builder? It's a trend that's already evident on the chassis side, where more operators are engaging with OEMs for maintenance contracts. The concept of extra services allied to the body is quite new in South Africa. We believe it holds value and are pushing to take the lead."

With purchases in the South African market driven very much by the availability of stock, Marcopolo is also gearing up to significantly shorten the lead time on built-to-order vehicles.

Although there has been little growth in the local bus market for many years and Ecenarro does not anticipate any big movement in volumes, the introduction of new products invariably sparks interest and activity. It's the bus body rather than chassis, he adds, that tends to be the element that makes an impression on passengers. The chassis is important for operators, given its role in safety and performance, but end-user impressions are driven by the body – from look and feel, to comfort, accessibility, noise levels. "In a market as competitive as South Africa, having the newest model could become a success factor for many of our customers.

"It's also a way to differentiate yourself," continues Ecenarro. "There's value in having the latest product offerings for an operator fighting for a contract – be it in the mining, tourism or commuter segment."

Marcopolo partners with all chassis

suppliers and Ecenarro is a firm believer in the concept of 'coopetition' – embracing both cooperation and competition – when it comes to working with chassis OEMs, given that market demand exists for a range of body options.

Marcopolo also works with chassis OEM partners in its dealings in sub-Saharan Africa and continues to set up new partnerships in the region, in keeping with each country's requirements.

Also on the cards is the re-opening of Marcopolo's training centre, which will provide training not only for Marcopolo staff but also for customers, dealers and international dealers, fostering close, professional contact.

The company is also working with Naamsa and bus industry counterparts to formulate a proposal to government to replicate Brazil's successful *Caminho da Escola* scholar transport project.. "It's not about selling buses: we want to improve the level of education in this country to offer a solid, safe, reliable transport system. It has been running in Brazil for 10 years with very good results."

Ecenarro believes that a significant change in mindset on a couple of fronts is required to pave the way for real growth in the bus market. Car ownership is highly aspirational, across all income groups – people want to own a car, or own a better car. Public transport has to compete with that mindset. In addition, a serious, long-term – 20 to 30 year – transportation policy is essential, instead of measures that tend to be implemented on an ad hoc basis at present. Hopefully post-election South Africa will see new initiatives drawing on the mass transportation mode of buses.



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# Technical committee steers to nitty-gritty

SABOA's technical committee meets regularly to press for progress on technical conundrums facing operators

**I**S the Department of Transport intractable on the legal limit of 10 200 kg on the rear axle of a bus? That was one of the questions raised during the recent SABOA technical committee meeting, hosted by Putco at its Linbro Park offices.

Although OEMs have raised the issue of axle mass load limits with the Department over the years, the topic has come to the forefront again in the context of rear engine city buses and the development of future energy sources in the propulsion of city buses, such as compressed natural gas and battery electric. With a 12 metre rear engine city bus (with air suspension), an axle mass of 11 000, up to 11 500 kg, would be desirable to allow for sufficient payload for productivity.

Although performance-based standards enable vehicle design outside of normal prescriptive parameters, the work in this field in the bus segment has focused on 27 metre bi-articulated commuter buses. What would be required, therefore, would be information on 12 metre rear engine city buses on air suspension to assess the impact on road wear of a 10,2 tonne rear axle compared to 11,5 tonne.

If there was any prospect of increased road wear, the DoT would be likely to turn a deaf ear – so it would be beneficial to compile a case based on benefits such as reduced numbers of trips, equating to reduced emission levels and costs.

It was decided that a couple of operators with rear engine city buses in their fleets would work with the

CSIR's Paul Nordengen to compile a desktop study including information on vehicle load patterns (if it could be shown that city buses seldom run loaded to full capacity and therefore inflict less road wear than presumed, this could be solid grounds for an argument to alter axle load limits). Feedback would be presented at the next meeting, in May.

After Nordengen's presentation, associate member 3M took to the floor, with Vusi Tshabangu of 3M's Transport Safety Division highlighting the fact that – with more than 150 000 active patents – 3M touches every aspect of people's lives (you're never more than three metres from a 3M product, reckons Tshabangu).

Its offerings in the commercial vehicle arena include high definition licence plates which incorporate a range of security features, as well as conspicuity tape. Operators should shun counterfeit conspicuity tape that compromises safety with poor reflective performance, notes Tshabangu. Along with physical features and markings, the quality and reflectivity of genuine 3M tape is unparalleled.

Other topics on the Committee's agenda included the viability of replacing the non-opening bottom windows on a bus with a polycarbonate plastic substitute, sharing of NATIS numbers, rollover protection, and alternative energy vehicles. In addition, discussion topics for the next meeting, in conjunction with the annual SABOA conference and exhibition, were earmarked.

