Schoolbus Transformed Into Dream Mobile Home

Skoolies are more than just schoolbus conversions. Each is unique and custom-made to meet the needs and dreams of its owner. Charlie Kern, founder of Chrome Yellow Corp., lives in a beautiful one as his permanent home. Although the company started as a party bus business, after they built Kern's dream bus home in 2014, it received so much attention that the company has been converting buses ever since.

Chrome Yellow Corp. has clients from all over the country who want everything from the basics to over-the-top luxury in a turnkey $250,000 conversion. They can be built as a mobile farmers market or as a conventional recreational vehicle.

The process starts with buying used school buses that are mechanically in good condition and with no rust, Kern says. And, sometimes, customers provide buses they have already purchased.

"We gut the bus completely, then add 3- to 4-in. of insulation, frame in the walls, install plumbing and electricity, and add a roof raise of 12 to 24 in., or any other finishes they want," Kern says.

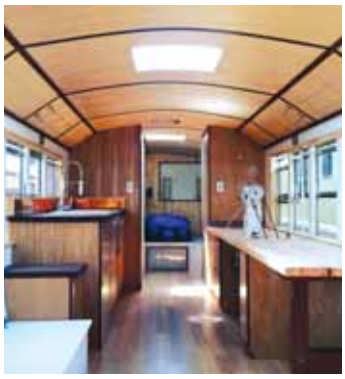
He credits his talented team for crafting what the customer wants - whether it's a countertop for a built-in industrial sewing machine or all the comforts of home for a tour bus for a band or a cold weather-ready bus for a Vermont couple who loves winter sports.

"We have the most experience of any business doing this right now. We have off-grid systems to make them self-contained. No connection is required for them to be habitable," Kern says, explaining they use a variety of power sources including solar, boilers for in-floor heat, backup generators, propane, and a second alternator for battery charging, for example.

"We can literally do anything. We are driven by the customer's objective and budget," Kern says. "Our big focus as a business is making a really high-quality product."

For do-it-yourselfers, Kern's company does rough-ins, leaving it up to the customer to finish it. He has a variety of bus sizes, from 18 to 40-ft. long. Prices start at around $38,000 for a bus with insulation, electrical and plumbing installation.

Schoolbus mobile home comes complete with insulation, framed-in walls, plumbing and electricity, and a raised roof – along with virtually any other finishes the customer wants.



To celebrate living in a Skoolie, owners started gathering annually a few years ago. From Jan. 20-27, 2020, they plan to meet in the desert near Quartzsite, Arizona for Skooliepalooza™.

Turns out there are plenty of fans for bus conversions. Kern's business has a six month backlog with current customers.

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Mobile Mini Ferris Wheel

Don Peterson's mobile, mini Ferris wheel was built from scrap, and that includes the trailer it's mounted on. The 4-ft. wide, quad seats revolve on an 8-ft. dia. metal spool.

"The spool was used for underground cable and made from 1 1/4-in. steel tubing," says Peterson. "I put a 1 1/2-in. shaft through it for an axle and welded it solid. It rides in bearings mounted to a framework of 2 by 4-in., rectangular steel tubing with a large sprocket at one end of the axle."

The triangular framework raised the spool about 3 ft. off the ground. This allowed him to mount the 4 seats to the spool.

"I bent pipe in the shape I wanted and formed 16-ga., galvanized steel into the shape of the seat," says Peterson. "The seats mount to the outside rim of the spool with 1-in. shafts on bearings. They are about 40 in. wide and can fit 3 kids."

A hydraulic motor connected to a set of 3 speed reducing sprockets turns the Ferris wheel. A hydraulic pump mounted to a nearby 1970 Allis Chalmers lawn mower provides power.

"I built the framework with a skid base, but once I put it on its trailer, I've never taken it off," says Peterson.

He built the 6 by 8-ft. trailer using steel from an old trailer house tongue for the main frame. The interior frame was fabricated from angle iron and steel tubing finished off by a board floor. The wheels and spindles were salvaged from an old car he scrapped out**.** Four large turnbuckles secure the Ferris wheel to the floor.

Portable mini Ferris wheel has 4-ft. wide seats and rides on a trailer chassis.

"I take the Ferris wheel to family reunions and local events," says Peterson.

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This shot of the Common Sense 8-cylinder tractor is unusual because most photos of the tractor show its right side. Here, the photographer put the focus on the engine, magneto, governor and carburetor, all easily accessible.

Farmer Has Fond Memories Of "Common Sense" Tractor

"I was born in 1930, a few years after my dad quit using his 10-year-old Common Sense brand tractor, which was the most unusual and innovative tractor of its time," says Minnesota farmer Ray Sands. "The tractor had an 8-cyl. motor, a single 50-in. wide rear wheel, weighed about 6,000 lbs., and was way more efficient at powering a threshing machine than a steam engine," Sands says. "The 8-cyl. motor produced about 70 hp. at the belt pulley and could pull a 4-14 plow in the field."

Sands heard plenty of stories about the tractor growing up because his father, grandfather, and uncle were investors in the Common Sense Tractor Company, located in Minneapolis.

"There were about 200 companies building tractors back then," Sands says. "Our family knew H.W. Adams, who had worked for competing tractor manufacturers before coming up with ideas for the Common Sense. His idea was to use cut steel gears, an enclosed transmission, and a single drive wheel away from the plow furrow to get solid footing and not slip. Adams was enamored with automobile design so he incorporated a sheet metal hood, sweeping metal fenders with running boards, and an operator platform comparable to a truck or car built in 1914, the year he started his company," Sands says. "The company built 15 to 18 tractors a year, about 60 total, until it was acquired by another Minneapolis company in 1919."

Sands says his family used its Common Sense tractor for plowing and spring tillage, but it would really purr on the threshing machine. "Most threshing was done with steam engines in those days," Sands says, "and there was always the danger of fire. The Common Sense was gas-powered so there were no sparks to worry about."

Asked why the Common Sense didn't survive, Sands says a huge economic downturn in the farm economy in the early 1920's caused many companies to go bankrupt. "Our families lost their investment in the company, but they didn't lose their farms."

Now entering his 9th decade on the land his grandfather settled in 1856, Sands still farms 40 acres while renting out the balance. He reminisces about a 1924 model D Deere that his dad bought new and used for threshing and fieldwork. It's the tractor he learned to farm with. "My dad and grandpa re-routed the exhaust on that tractor, installing an elbow so the pipe went vertical up instead of horizontal to the side. They did that because the horizontal exhaust pipe scared the horses that pulled wagons of bundles up to the threshing machine," Sands says. "The Deere dealer saw that idea, brought a couple people from the company out that year, and wouldn't you know that new Deere tractors had upright exhaust pipes after that. Dad didn't even get a cup of coffee for his idea."

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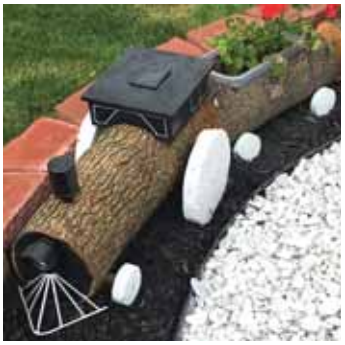
"Log Train" Flower Planter

"My wife Martha loves to plant and tend flowers. One day as I was cutting firewood, I noticed two or three ash logs laying next to each other on the ground. It gave me the idea to make a decorative planter for our front yard," says Bill Martin, Jamestown, Ohio.

The 6-ft. "log train" he made consists of 8-in. dia. logs set onto a 1-ft. wide curved "track" made of black mulch. It's located between a paver stone wall and an area of white crushed rock and includes three 18-in. cars, hollowed out to hold flower pots, and a 2-ft. locomotive. All mount on stationary wooden wheels.

The locomotive features a black engineer's cab made from thin plywood; a solar-rechargeable LED headlight; and a cow catcher made from welded-together 1/4-in. bar stock. Wiring for the headlight runs through a hole drilled in the log and back to a battery located inside the cab. Martin used plastic plumber's tubing to make a smokestack for the locomotive.

"It took quite a bit of time to build, but it turned out great," says Martin. "I bought a solar stake light and used my Bridgeport mill to cut it apart, keeping only the light and light housing. I also used the mill to cut slots across the bottom of each log to set the axles in. I cut up a small wooden fencepost to make most of the wheels. I also drilled drain holes into the logs below each flower pot."



"Log train" flower planter includes three 18-in. cars, hollowed out to hold flower pots, and a 2-ft. locomotive.

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