

By Andrea du Toit, Scania SA

TAKING the lead from his parents' interest in the bus and coach market, Thinus Le Roux began the family-owned business in 1995, repairing and refurbishing second hand buses and reselling them into the market.

The years to follow, although tough and challenging at times, resulted in a new and standing business relationship with Scania in 2004. During this time, the reputation of Coachman grew from strength to strength enabling the purchase of their first new vehicle towards the end of 2004.

With a secure foundation now established and the concentrated forward projection of the trade market by Sonja Le Roux, wife and business partner, the company undertook both a brand restoration as well as an operational shift into the touring market.

Sonja's foresight in 2003 gave the operation the ability to predict the industry's economic swing, allowing for future provisions as well as the power card to meet customer demands when presented. This included demand for a 60-seater luxury coach which, although unavailable in the market in 2008, was custom-built by Scania to fulfil Coachman's request.

The boom during the 2010 Soccer World Cup further aided the company's growth, strengthening the business relationships with existing customers both local and abroad, and also opening doors to new ventures with corporate clientele.

Again, Sonja's keen eye for business accommodated additional fleet purchases just before the boom. Coachman now held a fleet which provided services six months of the year towards the tourist industry and a full year towards the corporate arena.

Holding firmly to their family morals and company core values, Thinus and Sonja have complimented the bus and coach industry by delivery a mentorship service to their customers. Services include specialised group charter and tourism, acquiring cross-border permits allows for further destinations up into Africa.



All you need in a journey

From small beginnings to a successful touring operation, Coachman has come a long way. With a strong reputation, the future holds many promises

Q&A: Partnering with a compatible manufacturer

Scania's core values are customer first, respect for the individual and quality. Do you believe the two organisations mesh well in this regard?

Coachman (Sonja): In my experience Scania's core values fit with our own, as we are a family orientated business and appreciate the respect Scania shows for our family values. At every Scania event there are always spouses who join, which allows us interaction on a more intimate business level. My focus within our business is towards the marketing side, while Thinus focuses on the technical side of things, and here again Scania lives up to its value,

customer first. I always have suggestions for interior changes, for example curtain colours, and Scania is accommodating to these finer details. Scania is very solution driven and the sales force always go above and beyond, respecting our needs.

Coachman (Thinus): Scania listens to its customers' needs, even if it means modifying a vehicle spec like the 60-seater luxury coach. The whole company works as a team and really gives quality service. Even if the task is not a sales function, everyone helps in completing the task. This helps us to provide a better service to our customers.

Were there defining criteria, specifications and objectives when selecting your fleet range?

Coachman (Thinus): Sonja and I run an honest business, so therefore adhere to the road regulations which are set for the bus and coach industry. One of the regulations specifies that a vehicle carrying more than 40 passengers must have a double rear axle. Keeping this in mind, we wanted a vehicle that was not only spec'd to regulations, but also complimented our operation, which Scania was able to provide.

Coachman (Sonja): Rear engine configuration was also a big factor in our spec to Scania, as a rear engine is a lot quieter than a front engine, which is vital when providing luxury transport services. Once again Scania was able to meet our request.

Scania has shifted its business focus from product manufacturer to a provider of business solutions. Has Scania provided a business solution to you instead of only a product?

Coachman (Sonja): We mentioned the team work within Scania, but the team work stretches not only within the different departments in Scania but also to team work with Coachman. Scania really does look after our operation long after the

sale of the vehicle. Being a female in a predominately male industry, knowing I have after sale support at any given time is a big comfort.

Coachman (Thinus): Scania is very accommodating when our vehicles reach the service date and will provide solutions to meet our schedules and tours even if this means going outside of their normal procedure. This, in my opinion, is providing a business solution specific to my needs.


What other business support aspects do you make use of from Scania?

Coachman (Thinus): We have made use of Scania's driver training and product training. However, it is difficult as we do not always have a vehicle available to send with our drivers on training and drivers are very rare within the industry so our drivers are always booked.

Coachman houses a number of services within its portfolio; are there areas where suggested support could improve your services, which Scania could research to facilitate in the future?

Coachman (Thinus): There is a need for more detailed product training for our drivers. When a driver has better understanding of the product and can identify a breakdown fault, this knowledge will help speed up the repair process and even more so ensure the breakdown technician brings along the correct parts needed to get the vehicle back on the road.

Another useful support service would be a product support call centre. From time to time you will come across a flashing light on the dashboard, for instance, which is not a breakdown issue but guidance is required as to why it is flashing and what is needed to resolve it. A call centre which can assist in answering everyday product queries could be very useful.

Coachman (Sonja): A good way to ensure a more cost effective operation would be to offer on site services for smaller regular services, especially as we have a depot workshop on site. This would be a very efficient way in solving our problem of booking our vehicles in for services within the required kilometre period. 



Describe your fleet and how Scania fits in.

Coachman (Thinus): Our fleet consists of 20 buses, 10 of which are Scania vehicles. The remaining 10 are mostly made up of smaller 28-seater charter vehicles. One of the reasons I have chosen Scania as a partner is due to the spare parts system and design. Scania parts are universal for any of its buses and coaches, which makes the task of stocking parts a lot easier and ensures availability when needed, regardless of the model.

