

Non-Conforming Vans Ousted by School Buses

Publicity about the dangers of non-conforming vans has prompted many Head Start agencies and private schools to replace their non-conforming vans with school buses.

Representatives from Blue Bird Body Co., Thomas Built Buses and Mid Bus Inc. say they have recently experienced an increase in orders for school buses from Head Start and private and charter schools.

“We’re seeing a ground swell of interest that’s not going to go away,” said Blue Bird President Paul Glaske. He said the company’s Type A Micro-Bird has been a hot-seller as a van replacement. “We’re producing all that we can produce and could sell some more if we could make more,” he said.

Glaske praised the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for levying fines against auto dealers who sell non-conforming vans to schools and also credited a segment of NBC’s “Dateline” that publicized the superior safety of school buses over vans. “Now the schools themselves are saying, ‘Wait a minute, maybe we’d better look at this thing.’ This is good for students and for parents who are concerned about the structure of the vehicles their children are riding in.”

Meanwhile, Thomas Built Buses has seen an increase in sales of its Type A Minotour model for the past couple of years. “I think it’s directly related to the Strebler case and the publicity that the case has received,” says Ken Hedgecock, Thomas Built’s national distributor sales manager.

Jacob Strebler is the 6-year old boy who was riding in a 15-passenger van operated by a private school when it was struck by an 18-wheeler that ran a red light on July 12, 1994. Strebler family attorneys argued that Jacob, who was killed in the crash, would have survived if he had been riding in a school bus.

The resulting out-of-court settlement by the trucking company, the private school and the dealership that sold the van to the school was the highest ever in a wrongful death case of a child in South Carolina.

Lynn Metzger, president of Mid Bus Inc. in Bluffton, Ohio, said he’s also seen a dramatic increase in sales of Type A vehicles to charter schools and Head Start operators in the wake of the “Dateline” segment.

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