

# PUPIL TRANSPORTATION

## Regulated Enough?

By Ed Pinero,

Director of Transportation, TransPro

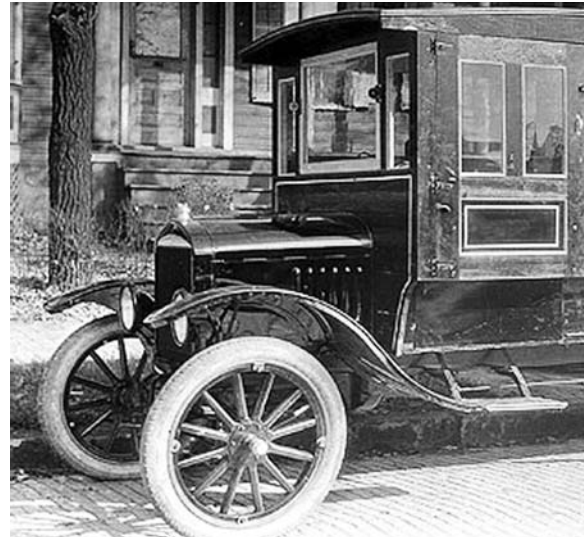
If the 18th century is considered the period of school transportation infancy and the 19th century the period of the industry's adolescence, the 20th century saw the evolution of a fully developed, mature industry. Disciplines such as bus/van construction standards, complexity of scheduling and routing, federal motor vehicle safety standards, federal government and state agency involvement, passenger safety, and more have had a profound effect on the industry.

School transportation has come a long way in America. This is evidenced by the fact that school buses remain the safest form of surface transportation in the U.S. It all began in the late 18th and 19th century, when students were transported to school in horse-drawn school cars, carriages or wagons, modified farm wagons converted to carry pupils from rural areas to consolidated schools.

By World War I motorized trucks began to replace the farm wagons and soon wooden bodies replaced the canvas that covered the farm wagons. Steel bodies replaced the wooden bodies in the 1920s, and the basic concept of the modern school bus had begun to take shape.

The school pupil transportation industry is heavily regulated by local, state, and federal laws that are meant to increase vehicle and children safety. But does it make sense in all cases or are we wasting time with needless duplication? State vehicle safety and compliance agencies require three safety inspections (1- state; 2- 7D) during the same year on a 7D school pupil van. It's not clear that three really is better than one, but it definitely is more expensive.

But there are those regulations and programs that govern the



transportation field that we absolutely know do save lives. By the mid 1940s, most states had traffic laws requiring motorists to stop for school buses while children were boarding or exiting the bus. One wonders why, 70 years later, we have not sufficiently addressed this issue. Recently the Registry of Motor Vehicles undertook Operation Yellow Blitz, an appeal by the RMV, in conjunction with local law enforcement and school pupil transportation providers, to draw attention to the national problem of vehicles illegally passing school buses that are picking up and discharging school pupils. Bus drivers are asked to identify bus stops where frequent occurrences of vehicles illegally passing school buses take place. Lax enforcement of these laws is the only reason that still, in this century, 80 percent of the children killed in school bus accidents were either boarding or leaving the bus at the time of the accident.

Those of us involved in the school pupil transportation business firmly agree that the safety of our children is and always will be our number one priority. Pupil transportation is one of this nation's greatest service industry's resulting in 10 billion rides to and from school annually. Even if the injury rate is a small percentage, the 9,000 bus accident injuries, including 16 fatalities, in the year 2000 is still unacceptable. The responsibility of transporting every parent's precious cargo day in and day out is a critical one, and is one that's becoming more regulated, but maybe for good cause.