

7213 is still extant --it is a 1964 SDH5302 (ex NYC Greyhound) which was delivered with full skylights and standee windows. It is the unit which was for sale at Arbutus RV in Cassidy in the late 1990s, and was bought by Geoff and Hal Hewitt, who adapted it to run on vegetable oil. Was run across Canada as the BioBus in 2001.

CW said:

I read way back when on your www.busweb.co.uk/bctransit entries that Bowman had labelled them 'dogs', and have heard it once or twice in different places since. I think it was one of those buses that couldn't make it all the way up some hill in Surrey when it was on a tripper, so all the passengers had to walk to the top and meet the empty bus there! They were meant for highway use on flat land, but obviously whoever purchased them second-hand for BC Transit didn't do their homework before assigning them to...demanding...runs.

JB:

However, the SDH5302s weren't all dogs - just that particular one, and despite an A++ maintenance crew at STC, nobody could seem to put it right.

LB: Just googled "scrnge utility bus"--the nickname the Hewitts have for 7213--and it appears in alternative fuel circles that SVO is short for "straight vegetable oil" or something similar, as opposed to biodiesel which is a blend as we know.

Figured out some time ago that the operational problems Jim described with the SDH 5302s (i.e. died on hills) were the result of the power train combination as I described. A 4.12 rear end behind a VH9 and 6V71 in a 40' would be nearly useless for many of the hills in our region.

As well as learning a bit about the differentials I used to the experiences of the Cowichan operators with 762 to form my theory—BCT had changed the rear end to something in the range of about 4.5:1 from the 4.72:1 that the 1960s 35' units were shipped with. Coupled with almost new engine from 962, the bus would happily hold 100km/h all the way to Lake Cowichan on Hwy 18, but the tradeoffs were

1. Shift now occurred at about 60 km/h instead of 30 km/h for most VH9 powered buses.
2. 762 had difficulty with a couple of hills in the COWV route system when carrying a load, ie: Frayne Road in Mill Bay.

The limits set by 6V71 being the only powerplant in the early to mid60s, and the problems using the 2 speed VH9 for a combined city/highway application explain why TDM and SDM models sold so well until the 8V71 and VS2- became available in the 3rd generation fishbowls. The SDM5302 sold in the hundreds if not thousands of units; the SDH5302 sold meagrely (like in the dozens)

As far as I know, the Hewitt Brothers still own 7213, last I heard it was parked somewhere in Shirley (beyond Sooke).

From my understanding, the World's Fair 'bowls were absolutely hopeless on hills, and not surprising. As the VS2 transmission wasn't available yet, these buses were delivered with a 6V71, VH9 tranny and a very high rear end (4.12:1 IIRC) to operate at highway speed. The differential ratio in BC Hydro's 1960s fish was I believe 5.61:1. So, between whatever state the engines were in and the unfavourable gearing, they were prone to not be able negotiate even medium grades with a standing load. Even with a VS2 tranny installed, the differential would still be a pediment for climbing, and according to 1980s rosters, neither the tranny or rear was ever changed on these.

7213 was the only fishbowl not active for Expo '86--it sat idle in its old MTOC stripes at KTC throughout the fair.

7206, the other SDH5302 in the fleet (1966 serial 096, ex Garden State) did have a VS2 fitted and a lower differential ratio than the NYC units, and it saw consistent use at STC as a tripper right up to retirement in 1986. Then it became a charter bus for many years (Prestige Coach Lines) and even did some Reno tours, eventually winding up as a band bus for a Lake Cowichan group, which still uses it today.

JB:

The seats in the SDH5302s were just straight benches, just like any of the BC Transit 3600/3700/5600/4700 series. They were also 70/30 blue/gold seats with stainless grab bars (if you've watched the movie "Speed", you've seen the exact seats I mean, as those seats came out of one of the ex-BCT suburbans!)

The ex-Greyhound/New York Worlds' Fair units were model SDH5302 (suburbans) and they did have upper level skylights the entire length of the bus. It was a fluke that BC Hydro ended up with them - Greyhound had sent them to Texas subsidiary Pioneer Bus Co. in Houston and they had used them for a commuter service which HOUTRAN eventually took over, rendering the buses surplus right around the time BC Hydro was looking for suburban buses to bolster the Hwy 401/499 fleets in Surrey and Oakridge (Hwys 401 and 499 became Hwy 1 and 99, and routes 651, 652, and 630 became the 351, 352, and 330).

Right around the time the Surrey SDH5302s were entering service, Pacific Stage Lines was returning the fifteen S8H5304As they had borrowed from BC Hydro which is why the 5302s became 7206, 7209, and 7213-7215. 7207-7208 and 7211-7212 had been S8H5304As assigned to Surrey for a very short time in addition to 7201-7205 which had been in Surrey from delivery before Transit decided to relocate all fifteen S8H5304As to Oakridge, leaving those odd gaps in the numbering sequence of the 7200s. 7201-7205 became OTC 3211-3215.

The ex-Victoria SDH5302s were 6956-6958, 7201-7203. The ones placed into service in the Lower Mainland were 7206, 7209, 7213, 7214 and 7215 (7213-7215 became 3957-3958 and 3956 around 1984 but 3956 was retired in 1985 before EXPO while the other two lasted until the end of EXPO).

7213 was one piggishly slow bus. I unfortunately got this poor tired old girl on a 319 one day with a full standing load, and got about 2/3rds of the way up....and then no more. Long story short, some people had to get off and walk beside the bus until I got over the BC Hydro tracks, I got called upstairs (except Surrey Transit Centre was a bunch of trailers so it wasn't upstairs exactly), and I and a few other STC drivers got pissed. The union blacklisted the bus, it sat in one corner for about six months, and then disappeared. Six months later, back at OTC, I get another horrendously slow SDH5302, this time 3956, and I get pissed again. Union rep finally has a very good suggestion - go out and write down the numbers on that little plate in the stepwell. BINGO, same bus as 7213, and that's where my historical hobby began, folks.

LB:

I spoke at length with Hal Hewitt, the owner of former BC Transit 7213, about his adventures with the "BioBus". Since he obviously wasn't trying to follow an impossible schedule, and probably had people who really tried to keep the old girl running well, he didn't suggest the bus was unusually slow. I doubt that he tried to carry 90-odd people up Scott Road Hill, either, but considering that biofuel is here to stay I'd have to say he's probably quite happy to have been one of the pioneers. Haven't heard from him for about 18 years, either, so don't know the status of 7213/3956.