



It was not a good start. Cdr. Harman, badge N90734 was four minutes late signing-on, but luckily, Drv. Forsdike, badge B963, had already extracted our car, Southdown Queen Mary 424 DCD, performed the walk-round check, set the blinds, and initiated what would ultimately be an unsuccessful project - getting the heaters working. Fifteen minutes later, we were 'on stand' at Victoria Station forecourt for the 09:50 service 7 to Shoebury, The Renown - a new route to me. (pic by John G.Lidstone shows us just arriving)

With two day rover passengers on board, we pulled away on time, through the cut-through and along Chichester Road to the Travel Centre, stop H, where the enthusiasts were out in force despite the chill weather. Four boarded, all wanting rovers, and then we're off through the lights and Travel

Centre, down past the Seaway and into Woodgrange Drive. Terry and the PD3 are old friends and he doesn't miss a gear all day - the bus just purrs along. Into Acacia Drive and past Thorpe Bay Station, into Maplin Way and left into Caulfield Road. Progress is less spirited here as there are speed tables, requiring second gear. Then onwards to ASDA and a circuit of the deserted car park (they are closed today). Out of ASDA's into Frobisher Way and then Eagle Way, and we are soon at The Renown. Terry has to work the wheel to get us round the turning circle and onto the stand. Here are the first 'real' passengers, who are pleasantly surprised that the fare is only £2 (and indeed that there are buses running at all).

Back to Southend, picking up a goodly load of members of the public, cash-payers and

| Stephensons of Essex Ltd |                  |                                                 | Duty sheet                 |          | Duty number: 955 C |       |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------|--------------------|-------|
| Depot                    | January 1st only |                                                 | Conductor duty             |          | Start              | 09:10 |
| Crew mobile numbers:     |                  | Driver: Terry Forsdike                          | Conductor: David Harman    | Finish   | 18:15              |       |
| Effective from:          | 1-Jan-09         | <mobile>                                        |                            | t length | 09:05              |       |
| Ends:                    | ufn              | Vehicle type:                                   | Driving hours              |          | 06:07              |       |
| Hours rules:             | Domestic         | Southdown PD3                                   | WTD hours                  |          | 07:51              |       |
| Dep                      | Service          | From                                            | Key intermediate timings   | To       | Arr                | Notes |
| 09:10                    |                  | SIGN ON, Prepare bus, complete walk round check |                            |          | 09:30              |       |
| 09:30                    | Dead             | Rochford depot                                  | Southend Victoria Station  |          | 09:45              |       |
| 09:50                    | 7                | Victoria Station forecourt                      | Travel Centre (H)          | 9:54     |                    |       |
|                          |                  | Thorpe Bay Station                              | 10:03 Shoebury. The Renown |          | 10:13              |       |

'twerlies' alike. Up to Victoria Station again, where a passer-by asks "No trains today?", apparently thinking we are on rail replacement.

Our second 7, the 10:50 is busier, with the same mix of enthusiasts and general public. Fares are simple: £2 flat fare (child £1), a £1 central area short hop fare, plus £6 day rover (£12 family), so there is no need for faretables. Back in Southend once again, it's dead to the Travel Centre layover area for a 10 minute break. Richard has arranged with the powers-that-be to open up the portacabin mess-room, where supplies of the fluid that keeps the Great British bus industry lubricated are available - tea! (and bikkies - we *are* being spoilt). A chance to thaw out and view the other vehicles running today - the Aspen Bussing Astromega looks especially smart, and someone has gone to the trouble of programming its miniature LED blinds.

Our next trip is the 12:15 251 to Rayleigh Station. I don't remember there ever being Rayleigh 'shorts' in olden days, but this is one route I do know well, even though we start a quarter-mile from the old terminus at the Seaway. The route is otherwise almost unchanged from Victoria Station onwards - straight down Victoria Avenue, left at Cuckoo Corner, and up the A127. At Kent Elms, Terry has to ease the Queen Mary into the fast lane and then into the filter lane for the turn into Rayleigh Road. Past Edwards Hall (of Edwards Hall Motors) and Rayleigh Road now becomes Eastwood Road. At Rayleigh, we turn right into the High Street, then almost immediately left, to descend Crown Hill, and then into the station forecourt.

The schedule compiler is a hard taskmaster for we have just five minutes here. At 12:45, we pull out of the forecourt, observing the stop opposite, and start the ascent of Crown Hill (who says Essex is flat?). Terry storms the hill in third with full sound effects from the 0600 engine - the dinner plates must be vibrating off the table in the Dutch House as we roar past!

At the top, we turn left, rather than right, following the one way system, before regaining the Eastwood Road. Passengers are few, but we pick up a group of girls, dressed

to the nines, intent on sampling the delights of Sarfend. They proffer Bite cards which (I think) entitle them to half fare. Nothing about Bite cards on my Fares & Ticketing sheet, but they seem young enough for half fare, so we won't argue. Back, once again at the Travel Centre, to park in the layover area, for we now have our lunch break (30 minutes).

Terry and I decide against McDonalds and make for a caff in York Road instead. Now, we could have had a nice quiche and salad, but you'd never hear the last of it if you ordered *that* in a depot canteen, so we settle for a more authentic omelette, beans and chips, washed down with a mug of tea. Then, Terry, in contemplative mood, recalled his days driving Albion Victors, Dennis Falcons, Lancets, Paxes, Tritons, bull-nosed Leylands and RTLs. Where could that be? Well, his badge gave the game away - B963 is a States (Jersey) number, for he had spent many years with JMT, right up to the Ford (Trimdon) era. As it happens, I used to visit Jersey regularly on business in later Swift and Dart days, so we both settled down for a serious nostalgia session, when suddenly ...

... *brring!* ... *brring!* ... *brring!* ...

... who could this possibly be, calling us on the mobile? Cripes, it's Inspector Blakey-hoy - we're due out in a minute and why wasn't our bus on the stand? !! How had he managed to track us down? It was never like this in "On the Buses"!!

It transpired that Richard had kindly shifted DCD onto the stand (he had secretly wanted a drive and this was his chance), so we left on time. Our next trip was another new route to me: the 3 (13:45) to Canvey.

We leave with a good load, mostly enthusiasts, and head down London Road, through Westcliff and Leigh. Past HH, with all the step-entrance Darts tucked up snugly inside, blissfully unaware that their days are numbered. Down Bread & Cheese and through Thundersley to the Tarpons. Left to Benfleet and to the War Memorial. Then, under the bridge (will it fit? - yes!) and past the station, over the creek and onto the island. A straightforward run now, through downtown, razzamatazz Canvey to the tight turning circle at the very end of Point Road, where again, Terry does it in one, without

touching the kerb, and then back up to the Museum [CY]. Here, mugs, brimming with the nectar of the gods are once more on offer and we have time for a brief look round: Craig Mara's Queen Mary (PTW-reg coach variety) is coming along nicely, freshly painted in Tilling cream, but there's plenty more to do.

Likewise for us. Back on the road, and round the one-way system, off the island and at Benfleet station we must wait time by the creek as we are a minute or so early. Waiting time opposite is Ensign's Cravens RT with neatly-dressed blinds - a fabulous sight - windows steamed up and interior lights twinkling in the deep gloom of the early evening.

Once more to Southend for the final trips - 7's to Rochford: along Victoria Avenue, over the Blue Boar and down the hill to turn left into Fairfax Drive, past the old PL depot and right into Prittlewell Chase. Up to the hospital and back along the dual carriageway to Hobblethick Lane, over the A127 and past the airport and the Anne Boleyn to Rochford, where we loop the town centre, the Leyland booming through the narrow streets.

Reasonable numbers are carried to Rochford, and on the way back, a slightly inebriated gentleman and an attractive Danish lady greet us enthusiastically. She declares that DCD has materialised "like a vision" out of the gloom to save them from perishing by the roadside in the arctic weather. Their gratitude is touching. *Godt nytår!* (Happy New Year!)

Finally, back to Rochford depot, where the last passenger (who had slept through both trips) is shown the way to the station, and DCD swept and put to bed. The only mishap to report is that the number three track blind at the back had snapped in half (pesky plastic things!) Miraculously, the cash balances.

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Driving home, I couldn't help but compare conducting now, versus conducting on a manual-box FLF as a 'student' on Eastern National in the 1960s. Like riding a bike, you don't forget the basics: waiting for passengers to settle in their seats before collecting their fares; anchoring yourself against a stanchion to issue tickets; returning the shillings dial on the Setright to zero afterwards, to avoid 'over-rings'.

One difference on January 1st was that nearly all the non-enthusiasts tried to pay Terry through the bulkhead, such is the ubiquity of one-man-operation. Even amongst passholders, there were some who did not remember buses having conductors.

But there was one thing I had completely forgotten. In two-man days, the conductor was a sort of ambassador for the company, or more accurately, *for the bus service*. As well as collecting fares, he chatted with passengers, dispensed information and advice, arbitrated over such matters as the opening of windows, the folding of pushchairs (buggies in old money), and dealt with myriad, minor dramas.

This came back to me on January 1st. Passengers asked: "What time are the buses back?", "Do you stop in Warrior Square?", "Can you put me off at the stop nearest Rayleigh High Street?", and of course, they asked about the age and origin of the bus, what was happening, and where were all the 'normal' buses? And there was a good deal of reminiscing about times past.

Thus, for Southend folk, it was a pleasant reminder of a vanished era. Yet, whilst OMO and modern schedules don't leave much time for drivers to chat to their passengers now, the fundamentals haven't really changed. Front-line staff continue to be the visible, human face of a bus service - and still play a key role in its success or failure.

David Harman

