

Ribble memories

by Chris Platt

I moved from Manchester (where I had encountered Ribble in Lower Moseley Street Coach Station - mainly on the X60) to Chorley (where they were everywhere) in 1966. I started work for Ribble in February 1974 as a stores clerk at Frenchwood and by summer I was also a part time conductor. I later became a full-time conductor and then a driver.

One occasion I remember as a clippie was being sent one Saturday from my own depot at Chorley to Bolton for the annual holiday fortnight rush to Blackpool. I arrived at Moor Lane to find X60s being operated by Ribble, North Western, LUT and even Potteries. The stand inspector had six vehicles parked on the stand as X60 duplicates and was loading as fast as he could. I was told to board the first one and start issuing tickets. All six left together and as soon as I had finished collecting the fares I was to get the driver to stop so I could get off and board the second bus in the convoy. This was repeated every time I had finished until I was on the sixth vehicle. When I had finished this one I stayed on it until I got back to Chorley - as it was only half an hour of a run from Bolton to Chorley I wasn't twiddling my thumbs for long.

Later, when driving, I remember doing an X60 with 1018 (PTF 713L), one of the single batch of ten ECW coach bodied REs that Ribble got. They were really nice buses to drive except that you couldn't drive with the doors open. Anyway, this particular Sunday some little darling let of a stink bomb on the bus when I was about three or four miles from Blackpool.

When I arrived at the Coliseum I told the inspector that I needed a changeover and I was told to go up to Talbot Road for a changeover as there was no-one at Devonshire Road that particular day. As many will know Talbot Road was the 'service bus' garage and Devonshire Road was the 'coach' garage. I explained my predicament to the fitter and was told that they could only give me a service bus and pointed to a row of Leopards and REs. I was just going to take my pick when I spotted one of the original highbridge Atlanteans that had been converted for one man operation so I asked if I could take that. After questioning my sanity he agreed and so I had a most enjoyable ride back to Chorley.

I got a rather puzzled look from my relief at Chorley but I explained what had happened and that the bus would be changed back again when he got back to Blackpool. I actually felt jealous because I had only done one leg whereas he was going to Manchester and then back to Blackpool. For some reason he didn't share my enthusiasm...

Getting started with Ribble & preservation memories

by Chris Platt

At the time I got involved with bus preservation with LuLU (as we called her, for obvious reasons – see below) I hadn't even entered the bus industry. It was about 1972 and I was an 18-year-old wages clerk in a slaughterhouse. I was very good friends with a bus driver who was employed at Ribble Chorley depot (having previously worked for Fishwick's of Leyland and Blackpool and Bolton Corporations). We were regular visitors at Geoff Listers yard in Bolton and one wet autumn evening we turned up and there was LLU 579 looking neglected and with a small hole cut into the platform so it could be used for towing.

My friend had always fancied owning and rallying a London bus and after thinking about it for a couple of weeks he started negotiations with Geoff that eventually led to us acquiring said RTW. We decided that, as there were already plenty of RT/RTL/RTWs in LT red, we would keep this one in OK colours. It was, after all an ex-London bus despite the livery.

Initially we kept in in the station car park in Chorley (with permission from BR and in return for a rental payment), but eventually we had a visit from the local yobs and needed to replace a couple of windows. We managed to get more secure storage behind the Fernhurst Hotel in Blackburn (near Ewood Park football ground) where it kept company with Ribble 2494 and BBMS No4.

We used to go up every other weekend to do a bit of tidying up, start her up and take her for a spin for an hour or so. Fuel was something like 30p a litre then so it didn't cost too much to keep her tank at least half full. I had my car licence then but not my psv licence but I still took her out on a several occasions.

We had a couple of years of fun and attended several rallies. We even returned to Bishop Auckland with her to get some transfers and other bits and when we turned up we were greeted by the local press who had been alerted by Charles Marshall of OK. I still have the cutting somewhere. They say all good things must come to an end and my friend started having domestic problems which resulted in an ultimatum - either the bus goes or I go. Unfortunately the bus went back to Listers and after a while it migrated to Scotland to a fruit farm for use as staff transport.

In 1974 I started work with Ribble as a Stores Clerk at Frenchwood. It was a boring job but I had got in. In the summer I started part-time conducting at Chorley and became a full-time conductor by the end of the year. When I finally turned 21 I applied for my provisional PSV licence and when my licence came through my training was arranged and I reported to Chorley Bus Station at the appointed time.

I was introduced to the driving instructor by the senior inspector and, after checking my licence and filling in the paperwork, we walked across to the back of the bus station where the Burlingham full front bodied PD3/4 was waiting. I climbed up into the cab while the instructor stood just behind my left shoulder. After explaining the controls, how to start the engine and so on he said we would go for a short run to see how I coped. That 'short run' turned into a trip to Preston, round the usual test run and then back to Chorley by which time it was dinner time. I was told to go and get something to eat and report back to the bus in an hour's time.

When I got back to the bus the instructor was already seated in the lower saloon. As I went to go round to the cab he banged on the window and indicated that I should join him in the lower saloon. As I went to open the door he opened it for me using the interior handle and as I climbed up the steps he shut it behind me and then stood right in front of me so that I couldn't go anywhere.

"You never told me you'd driven a double decker bus before" he thundered

"You never asked me" I replied.

While I was having my dinner he'd gone into the back office and told the senior inspector that I hadn't done a thing wrong during my initial run and that he thought I was a natural. The senior inspector, a very nice, father-like Welshman said

"I should bloody well think he is, he's been driving a double decker on and off for the past two years," and went on to explain about my involvement with LuL. My secret was out, but the instructor had the last laugh.

All my training had been round Preston and I knew the various test routes like the back of my hand. On the day of my test the Depot Engineer in Blackpool had gone sick and the examiner I was to have was covering for him. This meant that my test had been switched to Blackpool. It was at the height of the summer and there was no time for a trial run round the test route, part of which was along the Prom from Talbot Square to the Manchester (near Coliseum before taking the left lane and heading out towards Squires Gate and Lytham.

You can imagine the scene. There I was taking this huge great thing along the Prom and every hundred yards or so holidaymakers would step off the pavement. Eventually the test was over and I had FAILED. One of the things the examiner failed me for was excessive use of the horn. The instructor came up to me and said (quietly)

"That's what happens when you are overconfident."

He was right, of course. I had passed my car test the first time and I knew I'd pass this one as well. I learnt my lesson and passed my second attempt, which was in Preston. When my PSV licence arrived (from the Traffic Commissioner in those days) I had to report to Preston for 'Other Types Training'.

Basically this meant the instructor finding a suitable service bus, telling the driver to go and have a cup of tea, while the instructor came and supervised me on the run. It was usually a short local run, such as Bamber Bridge, and the conductor would just carry on as normal. The instructor would stay at the front and keep an eye on me as well as telling me which route to take.

My first 'other' vehicle was one of the Albion Lowlanders which were not the quietest of buses. As I set off down London Road towards Bamber Bridge the driving instructor suddenly tapped me on the shoulder and shouted 'STOP'. I braked as quickly as I could, much to the consternation of the conductor, and the instructor told me that now I had passed my test I had to pick up the passengers. I had just driven past half a dozen passengers at the first bus stop! Things got better after that.

I stayed at Ribble until 1992 before deciding that it was time for a complete change to something different. I walked out of Chorley Depot on the Friday evening convinced that I had driven my last bus. There were a few shouts of 'I told you so' when I pulled onto Chorley Bus Station on the Monday in charge of an Alexander bodied AN68 belonging to Blue Bus of Horwich. No one was more surprised than me, but that's another story.