

Some random recollections as posted to the Essex Bus Photos newsgroup:

Driving Leyland Nationals

From "Smiffy":

These [early L reg examples] were scary to drive, especially on roundabouts. The early EN [Eastern National] examples were bad enough but those acquired from Alder Valley were a nightmare (or great fun depending where you were sitting).

Turning from the Odeon roundabout (top of Balkerne Hill) in Colchester onto Lexden Road you could produce sparks as the platform scraped the road, unwary passengers would slide off those nice shiny plastic seats. Even on the straight they would wallow on the front.

We had 1659 at SE. Note the fleet number, transfers on a blank plate. Don't recall them ever getting a 'proper' plate. Do you recall that the rear part of the saloon (the smokers' area) had glass partitions right in front of the seats. An emergency stop could result in a broken nose for the unwary!

I could go on about LNs all night.

Well let's think about few things to tickle the memory: Modifications.

Cold starting...'you press this red button and turn the key'. Five minutes later...flames!!!!

Result: Blank the button off and revert to conventional cold starting methods (flaming rag or newspaper stuffed up the air intake).

Heating and demisting. Fully automatic, thermostatically controlled. Result: Took ages to warm up (hours sometimes), then there would be a click and the fans would start up. Within seconds you thought you were driving in thick fog!! Open the demister flap, turn that screw control (I'm turning, is it moving?) Force hot air down, warm ears, frozen feet!

Result: Fit trunking from ceiling cove vent, down back nearside of cab to force warm air round driver's feet (didn't have enough oomph to make a difference).

Mild day...bus hot as hell

Result: Fit Danfoss radiator valve in back destination locker (can't get any further away!). Didn't work at all, still either freezing or boiling hot.

Scene: 1735hrs Colchester Bus Station: HUGE queue.

Bus 1727. Load up all those happy souls.

In cab, select S, turn key.....nothing.

Out of cab, tell anxious passengers 'It needs a kick up the arse!'

Deliver kick, return to cab, turn key . . . away we go.

Scene: Service 53: Very cold wintery morning, 1979 I think. Heavy snow, A12 down to a snail's pace, took 3 hours to get to Colchester [from Chelmsford]. Absolutely freezing, no heat at all. Got to Colchester, made time for tea and a dog roll. Asked for instructions and was told to do a 70 back to Braintree 'they've not had one for hours'.

Set off, still slow going. Got to Bungalow cafe at Marks Tey and the engine started to run rough, running on 4 or 5 at best. Carried on to a phone box and called Braintree depot engineering. 'We

can't come out, see if you can keep it going', so I did. Blizzard conditions but I slogged on, masses of smoke, the 3 passengers I had on decided not to notice. Carry on regardless. Couldn't miss out Coggeshall in those days, but I didn't go into Market Place. Got to Braintree after another 2 hours and by then it was really sick. Into the bus park. Set down the grateful passengers carried on into depot.

As I pulled into the entrance there was a welcoming party (including Tony Mason & Bombsite). One of them said 'the turbo's gone, leave it on the slope'. Toe down to the floor, when half way up there was the most almighty BANG and a massive sheet of flames shot out the back all round the fuel pump. There was the welcoming party all standing with their ears ringing and faces as white as the snow outside!!

Someone told me later it was probably to do with the ethanol reservoir that EN fitted to cure cold starts issue.

Nick Field adds: Very true, the tanks were not that far away from the tanks, so a blown turbo would have been glowing and the tanks were plastic so the theory is correct.

And more from Nick Field:

Hmmmm, driver phones up "won't start", go to the back of the bus and remove flap above emergency exit, "ain't gotta a screw driver mate".

Got a penny??

Yeah

use that then

See the big thing with wires

Erm yeah

Press the bottom of it like a switch up

Ermm still won't start

Have you put it in S and Ignition on??

Ermm hang on is now

ok press again

510 chugs into life

Net result 15% less lost mileage due to non starts!!

Scene: 18:30, Southend bus station, driver starts up to depart and the right foot depressed to build up air pressure - loud bang and engine dies, driver walks round back, oil up the back and on the floor. Fitter attends has a look underneath big hole in the engine block and bus is duly towed home, following morning bus station inspector finds number 4 piston embedded in the railings on the other side of the road!!

Scene: 14:30, Southend Deeping underpass, bus out of fuel (common occurrence when SD shut and merged into Hadleigh), been there 3 hours. Fuel added and bleed up, start up and pump the throttle. As it goes to fire into life there are clouds of smoke and a loud bang and in the clouds of smoke it starts raining feathers and lots of them. The bus is running but sounds rough as hell, switch off and allow the smoke to clear, lift up back to find a big hole in the radiator and the belts off and fan drive bearings knackered - and the carcass of 2 pigeons that were keeping warm and asleep, only in the fan housing, end result tow home.

More tales from the cab by "Smiffy":

Here's one regarding FLFs. At Silver End we had 2788, AVX 956B (which almost matched my conductors batch FF27880 coincidentally).

It was a FLF6B with Cave-Browne-Cave Heaters, everyone familiar with the concept of those? If the header tank was filled to the top before setting off on a fast dead run out to Colchester for example, as soon as the engine revs dropped to tick over, the coolant would drop down to the header tank and a fountain of boiling rusty water would shoot out of the vent on top of the bonnet. Most alarming for the punters waiting to board.

The heater controls on the earlier CBC heaters were what looked like handbrakes in the cab ceiling right above the driver's head. Pull out the handles to set the flaps to direct warm air into the saloons. The system worked reasonably well if the balance of speed and engine temperature was right. The faster the bus went, the cooler the airflow. Later models had an air operated control lever (eg SE2852). This was on the nearside of the cab just aft of the driver's left elbow. This control was ideal for frightening drivers up the high street! Just as they walked past the front of the bus you could flick the control and the flaps would slam open or closed, always good for a laugh!!