

Follow Ups

EBM Extra 4 Scottish Exchange by Alan 'Tebzy' Tebbit

Richard Delahoy's article in the Autumn Extra about the Scottish VRs reminded me that there was another mass transfer of double deckers from Scotland to Essex. In late 1995, John Brenson, the owner of Brentwood Coaches, saw an advert for eight Leyland Fleetlines being sold by Western SMT and he arranged to purchase them. They were Alexander bodied LMS 151/2/5/66W, and ECW bodied ULS 662/71/4/5T. In the event, if my memory serves, one required mechanical attention, so it was not included in the deal.

One Friday evening, after the schools run in, five of us (three drivers, one mechanic, and John's son, Terry) set off in the company Renault Megane for Airdrie, Scotland. The boss, another mechanic, a local enthusiast (with PCV license) and one other, had travelled up earlier in the day, for sightseeing, and the enthusiast probably snapping the local buses. The rest of us arrived about 11pm, locating the guest house by getting directions from two 'ladies of the night' who were disappointed that we were not customers!

After an early breakfast we presented ourselves at the ex-Baxter's Victoria garage to collect our steeds. Surprisingly all of the maintenance staff absented themselves, only emerging as we pulled out, to cheer us on our way, or was there something more sinister behind those salutations? My beast was one of the ECW ones but I don't recall which. We stopped just short of Penrith for a comfort halt. John then made me convoy leader "because he has got the pace just right"! Little did he know that I was virtually standing on the throttle, trying to coax a bit of speed out of the thing! It was decided that we would cross the Pennines on the A66 to Scotch Corner, and head south on the A1. In my mirror I could see all of the other six, and a long line of other vehicles. I could feel the frustration of those motorists who had finally managed to pass the big red bus, only to find another one, and subsequently, another five!

We stopped at a service station at Great Gonerby, near Grantham, and £50s worth of diesel was put into each bus (total £350), a lot of money back then. It was an Esso station, and that company were giving 'Tiger tokens' with each purchase, to be used towards gifts. Terry was delighted with his haul of tokens helping to furnish his home. It was quite a surprise that those old girls made it to the Little Waltham yard without hitch, and none of them caught fire like modern buses might, being taken from local service work to a long non-stop journey. One of our clan had an unusual day, his right foot either hovering over the brake pedal, or resting on the dashboard. Our arrival back home was greeted by the boss handing out cans of John Smith's famous brew, most welcome.

Although all of them were resprayed into fleet colours, I don't think ULS 671T ever saw any revenue earning service, being cannibalised to keep the others running.

Below: Before repainting, an ECW bodied Fleetline on the right with two Alexander examples, amongst some of Brentwood Coaches Bristol VR / ECWs. The forward facing Fleetline is LMS 151W.

Brenson family, courtesy Jonathan Brenson





Above:: LMS 151W again, after repainting, on the right, next to LMS 155W and VR CJH 121V.
Brenson family, courtesy Jonathan Brenson

Below: A third livery for LMS 151W. By the time of this photo it had moved from Brentwood Coaches to County Coaches and received their colours, but the acquired VR behind is still in Brentwood Coaches livery. Seen at the Tallon Road, Hutton, depot on 27 September 1999. The two companies were owned at the time by brothers, one owned Brentwood Coaches and the other County Coaches. **Chris Stewart**



“What does it say on your badge?”

Alan ‘Tebzy’ Tebbit

That question was put to me by an old fashioned busman, Joe Osborne, in the office at 6, East Street, Tollesbury. I was "moonlighting" for Osborne's, in my early days as an Eastern National driver, and I was indoctrinated with the larger company's policy of vehicle familiarisation. Joe had just allocated me a Burlingham bodied Ford 570E (801 WPU) for a job, a type I was unfamiliar with. My answer to his question about my badge was, "Public Service Driver", and he came back with "That's a Public Service Vehicle, now go and drive it". I used that mantra often when challenged by union branch officials for taking a vehicle that I wasn't trained on.

Having learned to drive on a KSW and an LD, I needed type training on FLFs (including semi-auto) and MWs, before being let loose on the public. Later I had familiarisation on REs, Leyland Nationals, Tigers, Lynxes and Metroliners. But I had a habit of taking buses unfamiliar to me when nothing else was available, including a Bishop's Stortford Ford R1014 to Saffron Walden, a Colchester Bristol LH (at Chelmsford after being out shopped from Central Works) to Warley, and a Kelvedon Guy Arab to Blackmore. These excursions incurred the wrath of the branch chairman. For a misdemeanour we had a choice of either paying a fine directly into the union's coffers or making a donation to a registered charity. A local charity benefited substantially! I got my own back when the chairman and I took a couple of FLFs to Darlington as part of the Anglo / Scottish exchange. Before setting out the next morning I asked Red Billy how he intended getting home as he had not been familiarised on VRs!

In 1963, the company took over the operations of Moores of Kelvedon, with their fleet of Guy Arabs, Commers, and Bedfords. Initially the KN based crews carried on as before, using their own vehicles on their existing duties. However the next year saw some fundamental changes. The two main roads, Colchester to Braintree and Chelmsford, were combined with existing routes to provide through journeys between Bishop's Stortford and Harwich (service 70), and Tilbury and Wivenhoe (service 153). The Guy Arabs now found themselves in the hands of drivers from a variety of depots, Braintree (BE), Basildon (BN), Bishop's Stortford (BS), Chelmsford (CF), Clacton (CN), Colchester (CR) and Harwich (DT). Chelmsford drivers now found themselves with a duty that used a Guy (usually 2010/11) on the 0811 from Kelvedon to Chelmsford, having handed over the 0715 Chelmsford to Clacton FLF to a KN crew. Familiarisation sessions were arranged. The original plan was for FLFs to be allocated to KN, to cover that depot's workings on 53/153. Often, due to mechanical issues, a Guy would appear at Chelmsford bound for Tilbury. If a BN crew, untrained on Guys, were to take over, an FLF had to be substituted. The CF output team had to always hold an FLF on standby. Thirty minutes later the crew that had brought in the Guy would find that they were taking it back eastwards, so that the arriving FLF could be held. In addition, the Union had an agreement that any driver could refuse the unsuitable Guys on the busy 53/153 through services.

The familiarisation sessions were always on overtime. We at CF had an agreement that a piece of overtime would be a minimum of three hours, at time and a half, so a ten minute drive "around the block" received 4.5 hours pay. I wonder how many thousands of pounds the company paid out over the years. It did prove very helpful with the different types of vehicles the company was buying after the demise of Bristol, and I accepted the principle. However the type training on the new Leyland National caused a caustic conversation between the Chief Driving Instructor and me, but that's another story. Maybe the biggest insult was driving lessons on Ford Transits, a type universally available for hire to anyone with a car licence with no instruction. But three hours overtime was not to be sniffed at.