



Provincial Open Toppers



Provincial Bus Community



By 1951 a number of other bus companies were converting some of their double decker's to open top (mostly older ones) as seasonal attractions at seaside resorts. The first attempt at this by Provincial was made in 1951 using an ex-City of Oxford AEC Regent No 19 (JO 5403), already in its twentieth year. With its original petrol engine replaced by diesel, allied to a pre-selector gearbox, it had its Brush body decapitated by the company during this year. The other 3 buses in this 1932 batch had been withdrawn in 1948-49. One of the reasons for conversion this vehicle was that its body had developed structural weaknesses.

The following year saw similar treatment handed out to the unique Bristol K5G, No 54 (ECG 622); here, again, it was found that utility Park Royal bodies made useful conversions into open-top vehicles for three more (on Guy chassis) were adapted soon after. No's 18 (EOR 876) and 56 (EHO 868) remained top- less to the end, but No 60 (EHO 967) was rebodied in 1956 by Readings with a full-fronted double-deck 'coach-bus' body based on the half-cab design fitted to No 57 in 1953. Although 57 (EHO 869) was rebodied as a double-deck coach by Readings, it was designed to have a detachable roof for possible seasonal use as open-top - no evidence of its actual use in this way has ever come to light, however, but it was an early example of 'convertible' bodywork.

Another Provincial open-top bus was to be seen in service briefly during the late 1950s, following damage to its upper-deck sustained at Fareham's notorious skew-arch under the railway station. But No 13 (FHO 605), a post-war AEC Regent equipped with traditional Readings body when purchased new in 1947, was soon restored by the local firm to its former state.

These vehicles were mostly used on the summer routes to Stokes Bay and Lee-on Solent, but made the occasional summertime forays onto more inland routes. It was always a highlight for me when made an appearance on the 1 or 3 routes on which I lived. I have travelled on all of these at one time or another, and remember a particularly dangerous practice of trying to touch the roof of the low arch at Fareham Railway station from the upper deck as the bus passed underneath. This would be frowned upon today and would invariably incur the wrath of the conductor at the time if you were caught.

Withdrawals were as follows: -

18 - EOR 876 - 1969 (Scrapped)

19 - JO 5403 - 1964 (Now preserved)

54 - ECG 622 - 1969 (Scrapped)

56 - EHO 868 - 1969 (Scrapped)

This is not the end of the story, as People's Provincial also ran open toppers in the 1990's. This time they were used on the other side of Portsmouth Harbour on the Southsea seafront services formerly operated by City of Portsmouth buses. I do not have all the details of those that have operated since privatisation, but these have included ex Southdown Queen Mary's, ex Bournemouth Atlanteans, and Bristol VRs.



No 13 FHO 605 seen at Gosport Ferry after its altercation with Fareham railway arch, and subsequent rebuilding as an open topper. **Photo: Stephen Didymus Collection**



No 18 EOR 876 is seen waiting at Stokes Bay in summer 1963. It is on route 10 via Jellicoe Avenue, named after the famous admiral.



No 19 (JO 5403) on route 3 to Fareham West End, after passing through Fareham Station railway arch, close to West End Post Office at the end of Paxton Road.

Photo: Fred York



Bristol K5G 54 (ECG 622) at the bottom of Gosport High Street en route to Stokes Bay.

Photo: Stephen Didymus Collection



Guy Arab 56 (EHO 868) at Gosport Ferry waiting to leave for Stokes Bay.

Photo: Richard Arthur Collection



No 60 EHO 967 with its very short lived open top body seen here in Gosport.

Photo: V.C. Jones



One of the ex-Southdown 'Queen Mary's' Peoples Provincial acquired, 201 (AOR 158B) background. This vehicle was originally registered 412 DCD with Southdown.



To help with peak demands during the summer of 1987, People's Provincial hired two MCW bodied Leyland Atlanteans from Portsmouth City: 8 (ERV 249D) and 7 (ERV 254D), the latter is seen here in Portsmouth.



HOR 590E spent 1987-1992 on a long-term loan to People's Provincial , during which time it carried three different liveries: standard green & cream (1987-89), plus all-over ads for Ocean Sound FM (1989-91) and The Pyramids Centre (1991-2). It is seen here with the local radio version in Old Portsmouth.

Photo: Malcolm Audsley



This Brighton & Hove Bristol FS6B (SPM 21) was on loan during August-September 1989, and was photographed in Stubbington.

Photo: Malcolm Audsley



ERV 249D made a return visit to People's Provincial in August 1990, and was based at Hoeford for 4 Weeks. Seen here in Fareham bus station on August 12th.

Photo: Roy Jetten



In 1991, Peoples Provincial purchased two Daimler Fleetlines with Alexander Bodies from Bournemouth. This is 591 (NFX 130P), at Portsmouth Hard in June 1994.

Photo: Stephen Didymus



Sister 592 (NFX 131P) in the later livery on Southsea seafont.

Photo: Stephen Didymus collection



One of six Bristol VRs purchased from Western National in 1993, 574 (MOD 571P) was converted to open top in early 1995. Seen here at Clarence Pier, Southsea on May 14th 1995.

Photo: Roy Jetten



New in 1961 as 925 GTA, this ex Devon General Atlantean, ADV 299A, was hired from Leisurelink for the 1994 summer season. It is seen here at Portsmouth Hard in June of that year.

Photo: Stephen Didymus

