

# The People's Provincial Era



## Provincial Bus Community



Provincial was 100% acquired in 1987 by its 200 employees from its parent company, the state-owned National Bus Co, and renamed People's Provincial Bus Co. Through an ESOP trust, the employees borrowed £580,000 (from Barclays Bank and Unity Trust) to finance 80% of the acquisition cost. The other 20% was financed by each of the employees purchasing preference shares £700 (redeemable after 5 years) and ordinary shares for £50.

The ESOP trust was managed by seven trustees, of whom three were employees elected by all employees, two represented the two lenders (these two were to step down after five years), one represented the community and one was a professional financial manager.

After the takeover The Financial Times discussed the experience in an article entitled "Workers' drive helps company turn the corner". The newspaper reported that "...the ESOP at People's Provincial seems to have been remarkably successful. Absenteeism has dropped significantly, and internal theft has stopped altogether. Despite a passenger drop of 7% per year, revenues have remained fairly steady. This has been achieved through major cost trimming and some employment attrition. Most importantly... the attitude at People's has changed dramatically. Drivers are now very concerned about the business. They take an interest in delivery schedules and marketing, and have expanded service".

One of the most pleasing aspects of the takeover was the return to the traditional Emerald Green and County Cream livery, complete with garter and scroll. A break from tradition was the use of red wheels. The Peoples Provincial logo was based around that used by NBC in its latter years on a batch of Iveco minibuses.

The early vehicle policy was to purchase second hand Leyland Nationals from various sources to supplement the existing fleet, along with some new minibuses. An exception to this was the solitary Ace Cougar single decker 600 (H600 CTR). At the start it seemed that double deckers were verboten in line with the previous NBC policy, but as time went on some Bristol VRs from Bristol Omnibus and Western National were introduced. There were also some interesting open toppers in the form of ex Southdown Queen Mary's and ex Bournemouth Atlanteans and Fleetlines. Later in its life People's Provincial purchased some new UVG bodied Dennis Darts

During this period the company expanded its operations into Portsmouth in competition with Portsmouth Transit and provided welcome relief from the Ford Transits in the city.

As time went on it was decided to upgrade the livery, and the later version of more cream and darker green bands was introduced (a retrograde step in my view).

This chapter of the companies history ended in the late 1990's when the company was taken over by First Bus who owns it today. Below are some photos of this era.



*One of the Leyland National's acquired by People's Provincial N408 (BYW 418V). Seen here leaving The Hard interchange Portsmouth on 24th March 1994.*



*RHT 512S A Bristol VR ex Bristol Omnibus, with unusual dual doored ECW body. I think double deckers looked particularly good in this livery, and it was good to see them back on the streets after the fleet being all single deck for a long time. This scene is the Royal Victoria bus rally at Netley.*

**Photo: Ray Tull**



*Typical People's Provincial mini bus fayre, An Iveco 59.10 (L158 TRV) seen here at Hard Portsmouth. These also suited the livery well .*



*Seen in Fareham bus station is ex Western National Bristol VR AFJ 752T. It is in the later livery of more cream and darker green bands*



*In the late 1980s People's Provincial entered into an agreement with Fareham-based coach firm Lockett's whereby some of the latter's vehicles were given People's Provincial fleetnames for Private Hire & Contract work. This Plaxton-bodied Bedford YNT, NRV 303Y, is seen here in West Street, Fareham on September 3, 1988. Further Plaxton bodied coaches used under this agreement included TVE 777K, UAR 930M, D149 HML and KHL 600P, plus a VW minibus (GDY 959X).*

**Photo: Roy Jetten**



*The ACE Cougar was a short-lived midibus model produced by Alternative Chassis Engineering (ACE) in the UK during the early 1990s, specifically launched around 1991. Only two examples were ever built, making it an extremely rare vehicle. They featured a rear-mounted Perkins engine, Allison transmission, and were 10.5 meters long, Provincial purchased one of these as its No.3 (H523 CTR). It is seen here in its original People's Provincial livery. This bus is now preserved by The Provincial Society.*



*The Cougar is seen here in the later People's Provincial livery, not an improvement in my view.*



*In 1995, an order was placed by People's Provincial for seven Dennis Dart 9.8SDL's which were fitted with locally manufactured UVG bodywork. In November 1995, the first Dart was delivered to People's Provincial and was subsequently used by UVG as a demonstrator for its new Urbanstar body. The other six Darts were delivered In December 1995. These buses arrived shortly after People's Provincial had been taken over by FirstBus receiving fleet numbers 601 to 607.*

