

Transcript from Bus And Coach January 1966



Provincial Bus Community



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TRANSCRIPT FROM BUS & COACH MAGAZINE JANUARY 1966

A bus is as young as it acts...

The policy of the Gosport and Fareham Omnibus Co. Ltd. is to consider the suitability of vehicles or parts for further use on a basis of fitness rather than age. A continuous process of rebuilding has been found to be economic as well as providing useful employment when maintenance duties are few.

It is the conventional assessment of the economic life of a bus applicable in all circumstances? Or can it sometimes be set aside? The Gosport and Fareham Omnibus Co. Ltd. is well known as a pioneer user of air-cooled diesel engines. Some 11 engines of this type are now in service in modern-looking fully-fronted double-deckers. Of the current licensed fleet of 48 double-deckers and ten single-deckers, a further five double-deckers and all the single-deckers are also of fully-fronted style. The citizens of the Gosport and Fareham areas no doubt consider their local buses at least as up to date, on average, as those of other areas.

The "front line" strength of the fleet is up to date in conception. But the conventional system of considering that a vehicle's usefulness is necessarily over after, say, 15 years is not accepted. On the other hand, neither mechanical items nor bodywork are kept in service beyond the stage at which repair is no longer economic.

The essential factor behind the way in which the company's buses, or parts of them, can remain economic for up to twice as long as those of most other operators is the maintenance system and the philosophy that lies behind it. If, say, a chassis frame has been well designed and is sufficiently robustly built to be free from fatigue failure, it can remain literally as good as new almost indefinitely, so long as it is kept free from rust.

The wartime and post-war Guy Arab double-decker's frame was designed to carry heavy bodywork because of the scarcity of light alloys at that time. It is not, therefore, surprising that chassis of this type dating from between 1943 and 1948 have been chosen as a basis for the ten double-deckers with Deutz air-cooled engines built, or rebuilt, since 1958. Five of them have come from the company's own fleet, three were originally operated by the Yorkshire Woollen District Transport Co. Ltd., one was owned by the Midland Red concern and the most recent example has a chassis which originally

saw service with London Transport. The next addition to this fleet, now in course of rebuilding, has a chassis originally owned by Red and White Services Ltd.

All of these chassis were thus originally owned by operators with a reputation for good maintenance. In each case the chassis is brought into the Gosport and Fareham company's workshops at Hoeford on the outskirts of Fareham and is completely stripped. It is then rebuilt to "as new" standards, all worn parts being replaced and the Deutz engine installed. This process is not hurried and is treated as a task to be carried out by the maintenance staff when work on vehicles in service permits. The "production" rate has been one or two vehicles per year since the first vehicle appeared in 1958.

The bodywork on all these Guy-Deutz double-deckers has been of similar design, with 56 seats and rear entrance but having a fully fronted cab. Some have been built in their entirety by Reading and Co. Ltd., of Portsmouth, which has, in effect, been the company's regular bodybuilder for over a decade. In some cases, however, the Guy-Deutz buses have bodies whose timber-framed lower decks are built to the Reading design in the Gosport and Fareham body shop and the steel-framed upper deck is added by Reading.

The completed vehicles thus have new engines and bodywork and the chassis is rebuilt to a standard virtually indistinguishable from new. Not surprisingly, the vehicles receive seven-year Certificates of Fitness when submitted for inspection before entering service. The ten vehicles of this type had between them run nearly 1,600,000 miles by the end of last September. In addition a Ruston and Hornsby air-cooled diesel engine fitted to a similarly reconditioned and rebodied A.E.C. Regent chassis in July, 1964, had run over 53,000 miles.

Mr. H. Orme White, the company's general manager, is well known as an enthusiast for the air-cooled diesel. But he can back his enthusiasm with impressive facts. Fuel consumption figures are directly comparable with those of water-cooled diesels with a good reputation for efficiency. In a recent week six of the Deutz-engined Olys returned an average of 9.8 m.p.g. and six similar Guy chassis with Gardner 6LW engines produced an average figure of 9.46 m.p.g. The Ruston and Hornsby engined bus returned 9.3 m.p.g. over the same period.

The Gosport and Fareham area is relatively flat, but traffic delays are becoming an increasing problem. The company's services are predominantly urban in character. The current fleet average fuel consumption is 9.9 m.p.g. for weekdays, rising to 10.2 m.p.g. on Sundays because of the reduced number of stops.

Only two of the Deutz engines have so far been dismantled. That fitted in the first conversion, vehicle No. 59, which entered service in June, 1958, had completed 324,815 miles by September 30 last. The second unit, in vehicle No. 61, entered service in September, 1959, and had completed 283,979 miles by September 30 last. The latter is in some ways the more interesting unit as it had received no special attention during

its life, whereas the first had, not unnaturally, been "fussed over" rather more as the pioneer installation in Britain. On a recent visit to Fareham I heard this second unit running before overhaul and it sounded as healthy as some of the newest engines. So far as could be judged from outside, neither the Deutz nor the Ruston and Hornsby engines are unduly noisy.

The second engine has since been dismantled and has only required relatively minor attention to restore its condition. There have been few engine faults with any of the air-cooled diesels, and none of these have been of a serious nature.

The policy of producing "new" buses in this way has thus proved very successful. The use of old chassis is open to criticism on the grounds of obsolescence. But quite a number of completely new buses due to enter service in 1966 will have similar transmission, suspension, brakes and steering; indeed beam axles and leaf springs remain standard on all but a minority of current British bus models. The cost of the thorough reconditioning of the chassis is naturally considerable, but I was assured by Mr. Orme White that the cost of the complete vehicle is reduced sufficiently compared to new to be an economic proposition.

The rebuilding of vehicles with air-cooled diesel engines is not the only activity of this kind carried out by the Gosport and Fareham company. Its approach is in some ways reminiscent of that of many tramway undertakings towards their rolling stock. This is logical as trams were operated from the same premises prior to 1929 by a subsidiary of the Provincial Tramways Co. the company's fleetname is still "Provincial" today. A bus chassis is the equivalent of a tramcar truck and many tramway concerns rebuild their vehicles by combining new bodies for existing trucks or vice versa.

The first generation of Gosport and Fareham buses, of Chevrolet make, were replaced after a short life of about five years. Their replacements, placed in service in 1934, were eight A.E.C. Regal 4 single-deckers with Harrington 32-seat bodies. They were also instances of the company's willingness to pioneer, for they had diesel engines, then still uncommon particularly in what was a small concern. Their original A.E.C. 6.6-litre four cylinder engines were replaced by A.E.C. A173 7.7-litre six-cylinder engines in 1945-46. The Reading concern built new fully-fronted bodywork on the vehicles in the 1957-62 period.

Thus part at least of some vehicles which have served the Gosport and Fareham concern for 31 years are still in passenger-carrying service. Perhaps even more remarkable is the survival of some pre-war A.E.C. Regent double-deckers complete with their original Park Royal bodies.

Of the first two new double-deck buses purchased by the company in 1936, one is still in service with its original body the other bus also survives but received a new Reading body in 1955. Four other A.E.C. Regents of the 1937-39 period with their original Park Royal bodies also remained in the fleet at the time of my visit. The longevity of the bodywork is largely due to the original specification of teak framing in their

construction, and the company's experience has shown that there is little to choose between teak- and steel-framed bodywork for durability. Ash framing has a shorter life. Mechanically the A.E.C. chassis remain substantially unchanged, although the 7.7 litre engines, originally of the Ricardo indirect-injection type, are now direct injection units.

I was able to examine the 1936 bus during my visit and feel sure that few passengers who ride in it can have any idea of its age. Modern bus designers might find some useful lessons in its unladen weight, 6ton 8cwt, and the good standard of interior finish. The combination of durability, light weight and very fair standards of passenger amenity is remarkable.

Three 1947 Regent models with Reading bodywork also remain in the fleet and one of these was being prepared for re-certification at the time of my visit. It was anticipated from previous experience that it would receive a five-year Certificate of Fitness without difficulty.

From 1948 to 1953 the Guy Arab with Gardner five cylinder SLW engine was the company's standard choice for double-deckers. The first two had Reading bodywork (one of these is now reconstructed as one of the Deutz engined buses, with new bodywork), but the remaining eight were supplied with Guy bodywork of Park Royal metal-framed design and all of these remain in service.

Even Gosport and Fareham buses cannot go on forever, and current policy is to replace the surviving pre-war A.E.C. Regents with Guy Arabs acquired second-hand from Southampton Corporation. Four of these, dating from 1948, were acquired in 1962 and a further seven have been purchased in the year just ended.

The Southampton vehicles have been found to be basically sound and they fit into the Gosport and Fareham fleet particularly happily. Their Park Royal metal framed bodywork is almost identical to the Guy-Park Royal design on some of the company's own Guy buses. Gardner engines are also points in common, although the ex-Southampton buses have six-cylinder 6LW units and another difference is found in the provision of air pressure rather than vacuum brakes. The six-cylinder engines have been found to be slightly (half m.p.g. or so) heavier on fuel than the five-cylinder units under the local service conditions.

A.A.T.

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This 1936 AEC Regent is the oldest of several Gosport and Fareham pre-war double deckers which remain in public service and retain their original teak-framed Park Royal bodies. The unladen weight is 6tons 8cwt.



Representative of the middle generation of Gosport and Fareham buses is this 1952 Guy Arab Mark III with Gardner 5LW engine and Guy-Park Royal body



This 1936 AEC Regent with a 1955 Reading body was photographed during the mid-afternoon off-peak at Gosport.



The latest addition to the Provincial fleet operated by the Gosport and Fareham company is this Guy Arab which entered service last August. Although the Deutz air-cooled engine and the bodywork were new, the extensively rebuilt chassis first entered service with London Transport in 1945.



Although the Reading bodywork, dating from 1958, on this single-decker helps to disguise its age, the AEC Regal chassis dates from as long ago as 1934. It is shown on a Fareham local service operated on a one-man basis.



This photograph shows the same vehicle when new over 31 years ago.



The centre vehicle in this view taken at the Gosport terminus is an AEC Regent rebuilt in 1964 with Ruston and Hornsby air-cooled diesel engine and new body. The Guy Arab Mark III buses to left and right are former Southampton Corporation vehicles acquired in 1965 and 1962, respectively.

