



## The story of Provincial's air cooled diesel buses - Pt 5



## Provincial Bus Community



# The Survivor

Only one of Provincial's air cooled buses survives, that is one of the last two to be built, no. 36 (HAA 771E). After initial preservation by David Fereday Glenn, the bus has been seen at the premises of Continental Pioneer in Surrey and later as a camping bus at Fort Collins, USA., then in 1997 passing to its current owner Mike Blake, who was keen to use the bus as a tourist attraction in a wine growing area in Atascadero, California. Provincial Society member and owner of Provincial AECs nos. 24 and 35, David Whitaker, was keen to track down this bus. By now Mike Blake had relocated to another part of California and taken the bus with him. I understand that the bus performed admirably during the 250 mile journey. In autumn 2006, David undertook an expedition to California to check out the bus. I will let David take up the story :-

"The vehicle looked its age, and is clearly in a work-in-progress condition but, on close inspection, is well loved and retained. She soon roared into life when there was the familiar Deutz tick-over. The engine seemed louder than I remembered, but I could see no soundproofing in the cab or, when the front panel was removed, under the bonnet. I know that a great deal of effort was put into soundproofing when they were originally built. I noticed that the front panel lifted away completely from the bus, but I seem to remember the panels on the early Deutz buses were hinged.



The platform has no slats or tread-plates and is completely flat. On into the lower saloon over the usual raised step and you find that the original seats have gone to be replaced by a few wider (possibly American) seats. There are racks on the lower saloon ceiling for glasses and cups and there are no lights along the sides of the saloon just curved panels. The windows behind the driver's cab have been replaced at some time and bear little relationship to the originals. Each window has a single pane of glass; no opening hopper vents. Back down the saloon, step down to the platform and up the typically Reading's staircase passing the original destination blind box on the way. On the upper deck there was a great deal of bright Californian weather. The roof has long since gone, but the window frames are in place. Now, there are just a few seats with lights and small tables.

Mike informed me that he had needed to do some remedial work on the wood at the front as some years of being out in the open had caused damage. He told me that the original hopper type windows had come with the bus, but he had not put them back. The staircase is probably the most "original" part - the treads look right and the grab-rails are still

in place. The used ticket box has been panelled over.

There is no evidence of "Provincial", although Mike told me he has come across the fleet names, both original and 'abbreviated' when rubbing down. Upstairs the forward destination box has gone, possibly as a result of water damage, but it is still possible to discern the original Provincial name, destination and number boxes. She has an American Historic Vehicle registration number at the back, but still shows HAA 771E and the Deutz badge at the front. There are extra lights and reflective strips in various places on the sides and rear of the bus.

Once the bus was ready to go, we boarded and closed the gate door (possibly required by U.S. legislation). Sadly, I did not get the opportunity to drive, but Mike took her out of the gate and left down the curving mountain road, explaining that an immediate right turn uphill out of the gate would have led to excessive clutch slipping. I seem to recall that many years previously a driver complained bitterly to me of clutch slip on one of the fleet with a Deutz engine so the problem was not unknown. The ride was fine. That old Guy chassis still produced reasonable comfort after all



these years. The Deutz engine performed very well and number 36 soon reached its typical cruising speed of around 30 miles per hour. I ventured up top, braving the low hanging trees. It is not often that you get to travel on a Provincial bus on a mountain road with eagles flying overhead and lush farmland all around. The bodywork seemed firm and there didn't seem to be much movement or rattles. I don't know how much reconstruction work has gone on stateside, but it is fair to say that its original constructors in Portsmouth deserve recognition for this well travelled survivor. Mike told me that he has made some necessary adjustments and maintenance on the mechanical side of the chassis and the brake vacuum system has needed new rubbers. The only requirement on the engine was a new fuel pump. (Well done Klockner-Humbolt-Deutz!) The FG6L Deutz engine is well known and used locally in the farming community so Mike should be alright there. (Though somebody has dared to suggest that it would go faster with a Cummins engine!!!) I may not have listed all that Mike has done on the bus, but clearly, without his efforts, the only Guy-Deutz double decker in the world would not have survived so we owe him a very real debt of gratitude".

**Photos: David Whitaker**

