

Norwich Bus Rally 2008



Winner of the Bernard Watkin Memorial Trophy for the best vehicle at the rally, as judged by the other entrants, was a newly restored 1959 Bedford SB Duple Super Vega belonging to Sidelines Coaches.



Held under the auspices of the Eastern Transport Collection and sponsored for the second year running by KonectBus, the Norwich Bus Rally forms part of a major transport extravaganza staged in conjunction with the Norfolk Constabulary's annual Gala Day and the Radio Norfolk Old Car Rally. The Norfolk Showground site at Costessey on the outskirts of Norwich has ample space for the proceedings and the thousands of cars belonging to those who attend it.

It's an event that attracts a cross section of vehicles, with the current members of local fleets to be seen alongside preserved buses and coaches. As you would expect, there is a strong

East Anglian bias with local fleets well represented. Konectbus themselves showed four from the 36-strong operational fleet as well as a bus from director Julian Patterson's personal collection. Konectbus now have twelve Optare Tempos, including three with leather seating like the one shown alongside one of a pair of Optare Versas with double buggy bays, an Excel and a



Jon Moore of Sidelines.

former Lothian Olympian that served as the Rally Control office. Julian's private entry was a W-registered Bristol VR with coach-seated ECW bodywork in a very short-lived livery of white with a red band around the upper deck. Newly restored, the bodywork had been repainted and repainted by Busworks, while the retrim was completed by Hants & Dorset trim.

Julian explained that KonectBus sponsor the event because they are a local company and are keen to support local events because they are part of the local community.

Among other local operators were Sanders of Holt with a brand new Darwen Olympus Olympian bodied Volvo B9TL double decker, a Plaxton Cheetah, a Setra S315GT.HD and a VDL SB4000 Van Hool T9. Anglian of Beccles entered a modern trio consisting of another Optare Versa, and both double and single deck

versions of the Scania OmniCity. Another Tempo was one of four running for Norfolk Green. Smiths of Blofield's three entries were two Berkhof Axial coaches along with an older Plaxton Supreme bodied Bedford. Juds of Guyhirn had both open and closed topped Bristol VR ECWs, while Dereham Coachways showed a two year old Volvo B12B Van Hool T9 and a B10M Jonckheere Deauville. A rare type was the Irisbus Renault Agora Line showed by Norfolk County Services together with a Marcopolo Viaggio 330 and a Transit minibus. Lewis Coaches entered a BMC Probus, Peelings an Irisbus EuroRider Beulas and Fowlers of Holbeach Drove a Plaxton Supreme V bodied B10M that has spent its whole working life locally and still carries the original paint.

Sidelines Super Vega

Voted the best bus or coach at the show by the other entries was the newly completed 1959 Bedford SB Duple Super Vega 41-seater in the colours of Sidelines Coaches of Fornett St Peter, near Norwich. New to Currie of Bexleyheath, it served with Carter of Royston before going to Kenzies of Shepreth in 1967, staying there for 21 years and finally ending up with a Scout troop in the North East. When husband and wife, Jon and Lyn Ann Moore bought her, she had been out of use under a tarpaulin for more than a decade. They paid £600 for her and a further £500 to get her home. The couple originally thought that she could be brought up to commercially operable standard for around £10,000, as she 'didn't look too bad', but things escalated. They ended up spending around £70,000, sending her to vehicle renovation specialists, Cobus of Bridlington, who brought her back to pristine condition. Now fully PSV certified again, she is named after Lyn Ann.

The Moores originally ran a removals business but started organising tours and excursions using the services of Spratts of Wrenningham for coaches, and in addition Jon started driving for



The Bedford SB featured a Bedford 330 engine in place of the original 300 petrol unit and took a turn carrying passengers on a road run of the surrounding area. The owners will be using it commercially on a number of departures in their tour programme.

Spratts four years ago. The fully PSV certified Bedford SB will be performing on a programme of commercially offered tours that were being promoted during the event. A railway themed tour



A 1937 Guy Wolf with 14-seat Martin body.

next month involving an overnight in Loughborough is all but sold out already. However, much of the programme will continue to be covered by Spratts because loading the electric buggies that some passengers have is not very practical in the SB and neither is the luggage capacity for modern passengers. Spratts will also provide back-up, should it be needed, though part of the reason behind the investment is to ensure that the SB is completely reliable. Jon is under no illusion that amortising the money spent on restoration may take quite a while.

Free rides on some of the exhibits were a feature of the rally and I enjoyed quite a lengthy one on the Sidelines SB, basking in the orange glow of the Perspex roof hatches and front screen visor, while the zigzag blinds kept the sun off Jon's head. It quite took me back to my school days, though they were never in this condition, especially the front blinds, by the time I started to notice what I was travelling on.

Once numerous, the number of preserved SBs is relatively small so it was good to see another Duple example present, Len Wright's widely rallied



Konectbus's exhibits had a strong Optare theme with an Excel, a Versa and a leather seated Tempo accompanied by a former Lothian Alexander bodied Olympian that served as the rally control.



A contrast in Bristol ECW combinations from the former Eastern Counties fleet. From LtoR; a 1959 MW5G 39-seat coach, a 1967 RSL6G 46 seat bus; a 1949 L5G 35-seat bus and finally a 1950 LL5G 39-seat bus. All but the L5G belong to the Eastern Transport Collection Society at Attleborough.



Sanders have bought a number of double deckers new including this Darwen Olympus bodied Volvo B9TL.



Julian Patterson's newly restored 1981 Bristol VRT/SL3 with dual purpose 66-seat ECW bodywork in one of the more unusual Eastern Counties liveries.

example that is based near to the Showground site. Other Duple Bedfords included Myall's of Bassingbourn's VAM, Felix of Long Melford's Bedford OB, and a 1980 Dominant YLO of Spratts of Wrenningham that was being offered for sale.

Reminding visitors of the disappearance of so many municipal fleets were an AEC Regent and a Bristol RE ECW of the small Lowestoft Corporation Transport concern in their ornately lettered livery.



A variety of the 56 vehicles present bask in the sunshine. Ice lollies were definitely the order of the day.

rally



Fareline of Wingfield's 1983 Plaxton Paramount 3200 Bedford YNT.

Eastern Counties once dominated the area with its red and cream liveried buses, though it also had coaches in deep cream and maroon as an ECW Bristol LS coach showed. Two members of the same batch of 1949/50 half-cab Bristol L5G ECWs were present, as was a Bristol RSL6G ECW from 1967 with the short lived rounded frontal styling that later gave way to a more angular look and a 1954 LD5G ECW.

Other buses that stood out by virtue of their presentation included a 1937 14-seat Guy Wolf with ornately trimmed interior, a 1947 Leyland PS1 Alexander with 35 seats, a former North Western Leyland Tiger Cub Weymann dating from 1957, George Atkins' 1961 AEC Reliance Plaxton Embassy and a 1964 AEC Reliance Harrington

Grenadier, originally with Abbots of Blackpool.

Many other vehicle types were also represented among the 50 strong entry list, including a gold-painted AEC Regal RF and the obligatory red AEC Routemaster, albeit sporting a First emblem and Eastern Counties in place of the London Transport lettering. There was even a Dennis Condor Duple Metsec 110-seater in the colours of New World First Bus, while the BBC had one of its East Lancs Myllennium based mobile studios on site broadcasting to the County.

Last word

Torrential rain had been predicted so I went prepared with my coat and umbrella, only for the sun to shine brightly throughout the day. I hadn't

taken sun cream. It wasn't until we were well on the way home that the skies opened, and by then I didn't care.

There has not been space to mention everything entered but I hope I have given you a flavour of an event that is well worth attending, with plenty on the site for the family to do. I'm sure many of the same vehicles will be seen at the forthcoming Showbus event, but no matter, I spent a vastly enjoyable day chatting with people who are passionate about their buses and coaches, old and new, and I managed not to spend too much at the stalls selling models, photographs and books.

By Stuart Jones



Three members of Anglian's modern fleet present were a 2008 Scania OmniCity double decker, a 2007 Scania OmniCity saloon and a new Optare Versa V1100.



Gone but not forgotten is the small municipal fleet of Lowestoft Corporation Transport. An AEC user it was represented by the 1947 Regent II ECW and 1969 Swift ECW entered by the EATMS.



The former New World First Bus Dennis Condor with Duple Metsec body had seating for no less than 110 passengers.



Felix of Long Melford entered this 1947 Bedford OB. The Duple body has 27 seats.



Two of three coaches entered by Smiths of Blofield were a 1999 Dennis Javelin Berkhof Axial and a 1980 Bedford YMT Plaxton Supreme.