

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-JO1A
Page 1

JOHNSON'S MOTORS

(RUSHDEN) Ltd. (628211)

73 Washbrook Road. RUSHDEN

Readers are referred to papers NN-JO1 for the story of Johnson's Motors until May 1959 and NN-AB2A for an account of the period during which Johnson's and Abbott's combined their operation under the title of "Abbott's Coaches Ltd". At some time around May 1960, the exact date is unknown, Abbott's and Johnson's decided to go their own separate ways once more. Originally Fred Abbott had placed his three coaches into the pooled fleet and Johnson's had added another five. A total of eight coaches was not required under the combined arrangements and during the first year's trading the vehicle strength was reduced to five. Upon dismembering the fleet circa May 1960 Fred Abbott retained his three vehicles but only two were left for Johnson's and these were the Burlingham Seagull bodied A.E.C. registered JBE 1 and the Leyland Royal Tiger registered FTL 754.

Looking round to expand their coach operations, Billy Johnson approached Wellingborough operator Roland Walker with a view to purchasing his 1959 Duple Vega bodied Bedford SB3 and the Goodwill of Walker's customer base. So it was that in November 1960 Johnson's purchased the above assets from Walker and at the same time Johnson's adopted the cream and orange livery in which Walker's SNV 888 was painted, as their standard colours from then onwards.



SNV 888 was an attractive petrol engined Bedford SB with forty-one seat Duple Vega body-work. It was photographed in Walker's "Alma Coaches" livery prior to being purchased by Johnson's.

Bygone Buses of Northamptonshire is compiled by R M Warwick, "Torestyn" 101 Broadway East, Northampton NN3 2PP, who would be pleased to be advised of any additional information relating to the above operator. The records of the PSV Circle and the Omnibus Society have been consulted extensively for this series and acknowledgement and thanks are due to these organisations.

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-J01A

Page 2

JOHNSON'S MOTORS (RUSHDEN) Ltd.

For the following year - 1961 - Johnson's ordered a pair of Bedford SB1 models which were again bodied by Duple with Vega coachwork which incorporated a revised radiator grille and excluded the glass roof quarter lights that Roland Walker had specified for his SNV 888. Johnson's pair were registered XNV 916/7 and one was an addition to the fleet whilst the other replaced the Seagull bodied JBE 1. Thus the fleet now stood at four coaches and was increased to five in June 1961 when a second-hand Duple Vega bodied Bedford SBG registered ORY 551 was acquired.



The Duple Vega body was as smart as any British coach on the road in 1961 and in this view Denis Marsden, Johnson's leading driver, is seen at the wheel of XNV 916 on a private hire journey to Wembley Stadium.



In this view the offside of sister Bedford SB1 - XNV 917 - can be seen. It wore an orange and cream livery as did XNV 916 above.

JOHNSON'S MOTORS (RUSHDEN) Ltd.

Moving on a year to 1962, yet another Bedford SB with a Duple Vega body was acquired and this new purchase took the registration 266 ARP in January of that year. In the following year the ageing Leyland Royal Tiger FTL 754 and the ex-Walker Bedford SBG SNV 888 were replaced by a pair of Bedford SB5s with Duple Bella Vega coach bodies, each seating forty-one passengers. The registrations 173/4 DBD were allocated to these coaches and photographs of both are available.

173 DBD, a Bedford SB5 with Duple Bella Vega coachwork looks remarkably fresh in Johnson's cream and orange colours whilst operating a private hire for Wellingborough Parish Church.



Even in black and white the Duple Bella Vega bodied Bedford SB5 - 174 DBD - looks pretty smart in this offside view.

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-J01A

Page 4

JOHNSON'S MOTORS (RUSHDEN) Ltd.

Prior to Johnson's amalgamation with Abbott's Coaches, this firm held two Road Service Licences, the first of which was TER 3578/1 for excursions starting from the firm's Rushden Garage. In the event only one excursion of the thirteen applied for had been granted by the Traffic Commissioners and this enabled Johnson's to transport pre-booked parties of theatre goers to the New Theatre at Northampton. This licence and its equivalent with Abbott's Coaches Ltd appears to have died a natural death in June 1962 and was not taken up by Johnson's after the dissolving of their joint working arrangements with Fred Abbott. Johnson's second original licence was for an Express service to convey employees of Unilever Ltd between Rushden and Colworth House, Sharnbrook. The licence for this route was applied for by Johnson's Motors (Rushden) Ltd without modification under reference TER 5200/1.

In May 1963 Johnson's applied to the Traffic Commissioners for a second express service licence to convey Unilever workers on an assisted travel scheme. In this case the route started from the junction of Doddington Road/Croyland Road, Wellingborough and proceeded to Colworth House via Higham Ferrers and Rushden. Both routes were peak hour Mondays to Fridays operations. Over the next few years the Wellingborough licence was amended slightly to pick up passengers at Little Irchester and Rushden, Hayway whilst the service starting from Rushden was extended to commence at Higham Ferrers. Timings were altered over the years to reflect changes to the working hours at Colworth House.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s the car sales and servicing aspects of Johnson's Motors had increased considerably and the whole of the original garage premises were required for this section of the business. In addition, on the opposite side of Quorn Road, a parts store and a car body shop had been added to cope with the expansion. To cater properly for the coaching side of the business a completely new garage was built further along Quorn Road to house the fleet and this site is still in use for coach parking by Messrs Soul Bros Ltd of Olney.

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RUSHDEN
Northants.**

A facsimile of a Johnson's Motors letterhead of the 1960s. Over the years Johnson's address was variously quoted as 69, 71 or 73 Washbrook Road, Rushden.

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-J01A

Page 5

JOHNSON'S MOTORS (RUSHDEN) Ltd.

In the period between 1964 and 1969 Johnson's purchased seven new coaches and five second-hand models to replace older machines and to keep the fleet up to date. The Company remained loyal to Bedford for all but one of the new motors with either VAL or VAM models being favoured. The remaining new coach was a 1969 Ford R226. Messrs Plaxton, Duple and Willowbrook provided the bodywork for these coaches. The five second-hand vehicles taken into stock comprised a couple of Ford 570Es with Duple Yeoman coachwork; a Bedford SB1 with a Yeates Europa body; a Ford 570E with Duple Vega bodywork and a Karrier twelve-seater minibus.



GRP 186D was one of a pair of Bedford VAM 14s fitted with Duple Bella Venture bodies seating forty-five passengers when new in February 1966.



Not a very clear picture but in this illustration can be seen Ford R226 SNV 605G with its Plaxton Panorama Elite fifty-two seat body. (Photo courtesy Eric Ayres).

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-J01A

Page 6

JOHNSON'S MOTORS (RUSHDEN) Ltd.

During the 1970 to 1977 period another seven new and eight used coaches entered the Johnson's fleet. July 1970 saw the arrival of a two-year old Ford R192 registered ONR 685F whilst in 1971 a new Ford R226/Plaxton registered YRP 782J and a similar second-hand Ford R226 but with Duple Viceroy 37 bodywork registered EXD 375J formed the vehicle intake. The single addition to the fleet for 1972 turned out to be EBD 855K which was again a Ford R226 with Plaxton Panorama Elite II coachwork. A pair of Bedford YRT chassis both with Duple Dominant bodies were bought new in May 1973 and these were allocated the registration marks JRP 624/5L. In September of the same year an almost new Ford Transit minibus registered BNN 992L was taken into stock. The 1974 acquisition comprised a single Duple Viceroy bodied Leyland Leopard which was registered XSF 684K, being two years old at the time of purchase. For 1975 delivery came HRP 436/7N in April, again Bedford YRT chassis but this time with a change of coachwork, carrying Caetano Estoril II bodies accommodating fifty-three passengers, to be followed by a used Bedford YRT, albeit only eight months old, with a Duple Dominant body and registered HWP 173N. The 1976 season brought a new Bedford YMT coach with 53-seat Duple Dominant bodywork in August and registered PBD 345R. This was followed in the latter part of the year by HBD 796N, previously owned by Jeffs' Coaches of Helmdon, and KTC 126C which was a Bedford VAL14 with Duple Vega Major bodywork. Last but not least was PCP 972P which entered service with Johnson's in 1977, being a Bedford YRT with Plaxton Supreme coachwork. A selection of these vehicle is illustrated on the following pages.



ONR 685F was a Ford R192 with Duple Viceroy forty-five seat bodywork which was just two years old when Johnson's bought it in July 1970.

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-J01A

Page 7

JOHNSON'S MOTORS (RUSHDEN) Ltd.



Plaxton Panorama Elite II bodied Ford R226 carrying the registration YRP 782J was a long way from home when photographed at Ashby-de-la-Zouch.

EBD 855K was another Plaxton Panorama Elite II bodied Ford R226 and purchased by Johnson's in June 1972. It was on this occasion photographed at Johnson's Rushden garage. (Photo courtesy Eric Ayres).



Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-J01A

Page 8

JOHNSON'S MOTORS (RUSHDEN) Ltd.



Photographed on a damp day was Johnson's JRP 624L which was a 1973 Bedford YRT mounted with a Duple Dominant body.



Sister Duple Dominant Bedford YRT JRP 625L was caught by the camera on a somewhat better day at Chipping Camden in May 1974.



Either HRP 436 or 7N is the subject of this photograph and shows a Caetano Estoril II bodied Bedford YRT. Apparently these coaches were extremely sluggish due to the weight of the Caetano bodywork.



HWP 173N was almost new when bought by Johnson's in October 1975 this Duple Dominant bodied Bedford YRQ was presumably in the livery of its former operator Halford of Kempsey. This picture was taken in September 1976.

JOHNSON'S MOTORS (RUSHDEN) Ltd.



This photograph of PBD 345R, a Bedford YMT with a Duple Dominant body was taken later in life after it had passed to Soul Bros. of Olney. In this instance it was working a school run from Wollaston School..

By 1973 the Unilever's Works services operated by Johnson's from Wellingborough and Higham Ferrers to Colworth House at Sharnbrook, little changed for many years, were expanded by the introduction of an additional service commencing from Rushden, Irchester Road/The Crescent.

A new venture for Johnson's was the commencement of the Company's first and last Stage-carriage service which started on Friday 30th July 1976. This was a contracted operation on behalf of Bedfordshire County Council and comprised a shoppers and general purposes facility from Riseley to Rushden via Swineshead, Upper Dean, Melchbourne and Yeldon. The route was not particularly well used and was withdrawn in 1977.

JOHNSON'S MOTORS (RUSHDEN) Ltd.

For the final part of this history of Johnson's Motors (Rushden) Ltd the Author is not in possession of all the facts. It is hoped, in due course, to examine records that may confirm or slightly amend what follows and replacement pages will be issued should the need arise. In the meantime the following covers the generality of the situation but certain dates may not be exact.

Firstly, with regard to the company, it is understood that Reg Welsford bought out the Johnson family's share of the business on 4th November 1971. Billy Johnson was older than Reg Welsford and would have been over normal retirement age at this time. Johnson's leading driver - Denis Marsden - had been appointed Manager of the coach department prior to the above change of ownership and, in effect, ran that side of the business for which he was responsible. However, running Johnson's Motors (Rushden) Ltd without his former partner, albeit with the assistance of managers, undoubtedly put Reg Welsford under pressure and for some time he and Paul Gilbey of R L Orsborn & Sons Ltd of Wollaston had been in discussion about joining forces in some way. By 1977 these discussions had turned into positive proposals and it was agreed that from 1st April 1977 Orsborn's would, in effect, run Johnson's coaches on behalf of Reg Welsford. This was not to be an amalgamation of fleets, the intention being to operate Johnson's as a separate entity but using Orsborn's expertise to the financial benefit of both companies. Just prior to the new order of things becoming effective on 1st April, a spanner was thrown into the works when Johnson's coaching manager - Denis Marsden - died suddenly on the previous Saturday evening of 26th March, at the age of just 44 years.

NEW bus service to RUSHDEN

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MELCHBOURNE, Shelter	09.38	UPPER DEAN, Prince of Wales	14.01
YELDEN, Nr Post Office	09.43	SWINESHEAD, Five Bells	14.08
RUSHDEN, Skinners Hill	09.58	RISELEY, Bowers Lane	14.13

Fares to Rushden

	Single	Day Return
From Yelden or Melchbourne	24p	45p
From Melchbourne Park or Upper Dean or Swineshead	28p	53p
From Riseley	32p	61p

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Bedfordshire County Council

A facsimile of a Bedfordshire county Council issued leaflet detailing the stage-carriage service between various Bedfordshire villages and Rushden on Fridays only and operated by Johnson's.

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With this serious setback occurring a week before the proposed joint working, Reg Welsford was obliged to call in Paul Gilbey for immediate assistance and for the first few days operations continued from Johnson's Rushden premises. In the longer term it was not practical to run from two sites and Johnson's business was transferred to Orsborn's Wollaston base as soon as possible. Johnson's coaches had a letter "J" suffixed to their fleet numbers to distinguish them from Orsborn's for accounting purposes.

One of Johnson's coaches that transferred to Wollaston was a Bedford VAL 14 which was not popular with engineering staff in Orsborn's predominantly Leyland fleet. Reg Welsford was persuaded to part with this machine and replace it with a Leyland Leopard in February 1978. The chosen vehicle was a second-hand coach registered MTM 646H carrying a fifty-one seat Duple Northern Commander IV body. Also sold without replacement during Johnson's occupation of the Wollaston site were the two Ford R226 coaches YRP 782J and EBD 855K.

In June 1978, at the time of renewal of one of Johnson's Road Service Licences, this firm's three express services operating from Wellingborough, Higham Ferrers and Rushden to Sharnbrook, Colworth House for the conveyance of Unilever employees were transferred to Shelton-Orsborn under the references TER 4870/30, 31 and 32 and remained with R L Orsborn & Sons Ltd.

The joint working arrangements between Johnson's and Orsborn's were never entirely happy and possibly Reg Welsford expected a little too much from it in financial terms. In fact, in October 1979, Reg Welsford pulled back from his ties with R L Orsborn & Son Ltd and instead joined with Reg Bates of Rothwell in a similar joint working arrangement, transferring his vehicle to Rothwell. Here too the mutual arrangements seemed no more successful than with Orsborn's and in June 1981 Reg Welsford began returning his vehicles to Rushden whilst leaving others at Rothwell. Over the course of a year all appear to have returned to Johnson's Quorn Road, Rushden headquarters.

Between June 1981 and June 1983 Reg Welsford bought four second-hand coaches and a brand new Bova which took the registration DNV 436X in April 1982. The first of the second-hand purchases comprised a Duple bodied Bedford VAS numbered JRY 834E. Next, for reasons unknown to the Author, in August 1982 Johnson's exchanged with Mackie's of Alloa their new Bova coach for a two-and-a-half year old DAF MB200 equipped with a Plaxton Supreme IV body. This vehicle was registered FLS 733V. The final second-hand intake comprised a Duple Dominant bodied Bedford YMT lettered EVC 210T and an A.E.C. Reliance 691 with Plaxton Panorama Elite coachwork carrying the registration BVF 436J.

Reg Welsford soldiered on with Johnson's Motors for another two years until he sold his coaching activities to Soul Bros Ltd of Olney on 1st September 1984 together with eight coaches. By this time Reg was 74 years of age. The Company "Johnson's Motors (Rushden) Ltd" remained with the Welsford family as did the premises at Rushden. However, the Quorn Road coach garage was leased to Soul Bros and at a later date was

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-J01A

Page 13

JOHNSON'S MOTORS (RUSHDEN) Ltd.

purchased by them after the death of Reg Welsford in November 1988. Soul's continued with Johnson's name until February 1985 when the business was fully incorporated into Soul's portfolio but operated as "Soul's of Rushden". In the meantime the company Johnson's Motors (Rushden) Ltd had been wound up voluntarily in June 1985, being dissolved on 13th August 1987.

Finally, a couple of pictures of vehicles bought by Johnson's Motors in the firm's last years of operation but not photographed until subsequently purchased by Soul Bros. of Olney.



Seen leaving Roade School in FLS 733V, a DAF MB200 fitted with a fifty-seven seat Plaxton Supreme IV body.

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[RUSHDEN] LTD**

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A facsimile of a Johnson's Motors letterhead of circa 1970/1.

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-J01A

Page 14

JOHNSON'S MOTORS (RUSHDEN) Ltd.



This Bedford YMT with Duple Dominant II coachwork, registered EVC 210T, was photographed in the North Buckinghamshire village of North Crawley.

Byparr Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-JO1A

Page 15

JOHNSON'S MOTORS (RUSHDEN) Ltd.

STOCK NO.	REGN. NO.	CHASSIS			BODY			DATES			PREVIOUS OWNER	INITIAL DISPOSAL	NOTES
		MAKE	TYPE	NUMBER	MAKE	TYPE & SEATS	NUMBER	NEW	S/H	W/D			
	JBE 1	A.E.C.	Regal IV	9821E520	Burlingham Seagull	C37C	5146	4/52	c5/60	2/61	Abbott's Coaches Ltd, Rushden	Parkinson, Welwyn Garden City	
	FTL 754	Leyland	Royal Tiger PSU1/15	511098	Duple Ambassador	C41C	84/6	3/52	c5/60	12/62	Abbott's Coaches Ltd, Rushden	Davis, Grafham	
	SNV 888	Bedford	SB3	66756	Duple Vega	C41F	1105/234	1/59	11/60	3/62	R D Walker, (Alma), Wellingborough	Cotton, Bilton	
	XNV 916	Bedford	SB1	86255	Duple Vega	C41F		1/61	—	2/63	—	Cotton, Bilton	
	XNV 917	Bedford	SB1	86248	Duple Vega	C41F		2/61	—	5/66	—	Long, Harston	
	ORY 551	Bedford	SBG	43490	Duple Vega	C41F		3/56	6/61	4/64	J Smith, Leicester	Eales, Wellingborough	
	266 ARP	Bedford	SB5	89416	Duple Vega	C41F		1/62	—	3/66	—	Ellis, Llangefni	
	173 DBD	Bedford	SB5	90967	Duple Bella Vega	C41F	1159/36	1/63	—	2/68	—	Soul, Olney	
	174 DBD	Bedford	SB5	90889	Duple Bella Vega	C41F	1159/38	2/63	—	2/69	—	Singh, Leicester	
	214 BLA	Ford	570E	510E51525	Duple Yeoman	C41F	1139/42	-/61	5/64	11/64	Ementon, Cranfield	Deacon & Hardy, Barlestone	
	CNV 698B	Bedford	VAL 14	1576	Plaxton Panorama	C52F	652713	11/64	—	2/68	—	Davies, Leeswood	
	GRP 186D	Bedford	VAM 14	6823573	Duple B. Venture	C45F	1205/225	2/66	—	12/71	—	Mellows, Holloway N7	
	GRP 187D	Bedford	VAM 14	6823547	Duple B. Venture	C45F	1205/152	5/66	—	5/73	—	Grant & McAllen, Beighton	
	808 DOK	Ford	570E	510E63122	Duple Yeoman	C41F	1139/290	5/61	6/66	7/66	S E Smith, Potterspurty	Torr, Netherfield	
	AWR 308B	Karrier	BF3023	98A2219	Walker	C12F	—	4/64	10/67	11/70	W H Mitchell, Settle	Storey, Ely	
46	ONV 319F	Bedford	VAM 70	451351	Duple Viceroy	C45F	1215/201	3/68	—	10/75	—	Smith, Corby Glen	
	ONV 320F	Bedford	VAL 70	452588	Duple (N) Viceroy 36	C52F	182/25	3/68	—	4/69	—	Dew, Somersham	
	126 GUP	Bedford	SB1	78397	Yeates Europa	C41F	827	4/60	2/69	7/69	Buxton, Broughton Astley	Laing, London NW7	
	SNV 604G	Bedford	VAM 70	456376	Willowbrook	DP45F	1221/2	3/69	—	4/71	—	Collett, W Bromwich	
51	SNV 605G	Ford	R226	BC04JJ 56240	Plaxton Pan. Elite	C52F	692787	4/69	—	9/76	—	Straw, Leicester	
	XWV 20	Ford	570E	510E62311	Duple Vega	C41F	1139/217	3/61	8/69	6/72	Fale, Combe Down	Jones, Blaenau Ffestiniog	

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

JOHNSON'S MOTORS (RUSHDEN) Ltd.

NN-JO1A
Page 16

STOCK NO.	REGN. NO.	CHASSIS			BODY			DATES			PREVIOUS OWNER	INITIAL DISPOSAL	NOTES
		MAKE	TYPE	NUMBER	MAKE	TYPE & SEATS	NUMBER	NEW	S/H	W/D			
	ONR 685F	Ford	R192	BC04GL 19926	Duple Viceroy	C45F	1216/48	7/68	7/70	5/73	Hart, Donisthorpe	Howard, King's Cliffe	
54	YRP 782J	Ford	R226	BC04KA 47141	Plaxton Pan. Elite II	C53F	712806	4/71	—	1/79	—	Smith, Corby Glen	
55	EXD 375J	Ford	R226	BC04KR 57777	Duple Viceroy 37	C53F	230/73	2/71	12/71	3/75	Travel House, Luton	Hodson, Navenby	
56	EBD 855K	Ford	R226	BC04LS 47145	Plaxton Pan. Elite II	C53F	728650	6/72	—	1/79	—	Fenwick, Bolingbroke	
57	JRP 624L	Bedford	YRT	CW454691	Duple	C53F	272/1008	5/73	—	9/84	—	Soul Bros Ltd., Olney	
58	JRP 625L	Bedford	YRT	CW454672	Duple Dominant	C53F	272/1009	5/73	—	9/84	—	Soul Bros Ltd., Olney	
	BNN 992L	Ford	Transit	BC05MC 59540	Moseley	C12F		-/73	9/73	?	Dickman, Ruddington	?	
59	XSF 684K	Leyland	Leopard PSU3B/4R	7102243	Duple Viceroy	C53F	242/1	2/72	2/74	3/75	Ambassador, Polton Lasswade	Shadwell, Warrington	
60	HRP 436N	Bedford	YRT	DW453949	Caetano Estoril II	C53F	74/52	4/75	—	9/84	—	Soul Bros Ltd., Olney	
61	HRP 437N	Bedford	YRT	DW452469	Caetano Estoril II	C53F	74/51	4/75	—	9/84	—	Soul Bros Ltd., Olney	
	HWP 173N	Bedford	YRQ	EW451327	Duple	C45F	415/2125	2/75	10/75	4/77	Halford, Kempsey	Fale, Coombe Down	
63	PBD 345R	Bedford	YMT	FW455271	Duple Dominant	C53F	617/2461	8/76	—	9/84	—	Soul Bros Ltd., Olney	
	HBD 796N	Bedford	YRT	EW451036	Duple Dominant	C52F	517/2373	1/75	9/76	3/77	Jeffer, Helmdon	Bolton Coachways	
	KTC 126C	Bedford	VAL 14	1635	Duple Vega Major	C53F	1185/54	3/65	11/76	3/78	Longstaff, Mirfield	Fenn, March	
	PCP 972P	Bedford	YRT	FW454761	Plaxton Supreme	C53F	7611TC 036	4/76	by 3/77	by 6/84	Abbeyways, Halifax	O'Brien, Portlaoise	
66	MTM646H	Leyland	Leopard PSU3A/4R	901104	Duple N. Comm IV	C51F	204/22	8/69	2/78	7/83	Inins, Gt.Kingshall	Vernon's Pools, Liverpool	
	JRY 834E	Bedford	VAS 1	7829125	Duple Vista 25	C53F	1211/24	4/67	6/81	by 9/83	Smith, Corby Glen	Goodwin, Benchill	
	DNV 436X	Bova	EL26/581		Bova	C53F	—	4/82	—	8/82	—	Mackie, Alloa	
	FLS 733V	DAF	MB200DK TL600	190482	Plaxton Supreme IV	C53F	8012DC 005	2/80	8/82	9/84	Mackie, Alloa	Soul Bros Ltd., Olney	
	EVC 210T	Bedford	YMT	JW454125	Duple	C53F	917/2471	5/79	6/83	9/84	Ardenvale, Knowle	Soul Bros Ltd., Olney	
	BVF 436J	A.E.C.	Reliance 691	6U3ZR7819	Plaxton Pan. Elite	C53F	713999	7/71	6/83	9/84	Redcar, Norwich	Soul Bros Ltd., Olney	