

## **PALMERSTON GARAGE (Northampton) Ltd (505432) 85-87 Palmerston Road (later St James' Mill Road) NORTHAMPTON**

It is believed that Frances George Blackwell set up in business as a motor engineer, garage proprietor and motor dealer at 85-87 Palmerston Road, Northampton in the 1930s. By the early 1950s the business had developed to the stage where it seemed appropriate to form a Limited Liability Company and, accordingly, Frances George Blackwell together with Charles Albert Whiting (a motor mechanic) and Alan John Penn (an Accountant) jointly subscribed to Palmerston Garage (Northampton) Ltd. This new company was incorporated on 13th March 1952 with a nominal capital of £2,000 divided into 2,000 Shares of £1 each. Blackwell held 1,000, Whiting 250 and Penn 200 Shares.

It would appear that Frances George Blackwell died in 1962 and in October of that year the Capital of the Company was increased from £2,000 to £5,000 by the creation of 1,500 Shares of £1 ranking equally with the existing 2,000 Shares; and 1,500 Preference Shares allotted to Mrs Ethel Blackwell and to which were attached special rights and privileges. At this point the business may have floundered somewhat with the loss of its main player and it is believed that Alan Penn persuaded Archibald Frederick Bull, who was the Sales Manager of Airflow Streamlines of New Duston, to join the Board of Palmerston Garage. Thus Arch Bull became a Shareholder and it was arranged that his son - John Stewart Frederick Bull, who also worked for Airflow - to be appointed Manager of Palmerston Garage. The Company prospered and three years later John Bull was also appointed to the Board. The Author has been unable to establish when Charles Albert Whiting ceased to have an interest in the Company but by July 1972 the Shareholding was as follows:-

A J Penn	484 Ordinary Shares	750 Preference Shares
A F Bull	484 Ordinary Shares	750 Preference Shares
J S F Bull	484 Ordinary Shares	

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*An illustration of Palmerston Garage dating from the 1930s.*

With Arch and John Bull steering Palmerston Garage from 1962 the business picked up again and in October 1966 Palmerston bought the six minibus operation of Lion Services (Northampton) Ltd - see paper NN-LI1. This outfit traded as Country Lion Mini-Buses from rented premises at 68 Denmark Road, Northampton which was in the neighbourhood of Palmerston Road.



The six minibuses acquired in this transaction were an eleven-seater Morris J2, a fourteen-seater Morris LD2 and four Commer 1500s that had been converted to twelve-seaters by Messrs Harrington of Hove.

*927 DTM was a Morris J2 dating from 1961. It was not in wonderful condition and was retained for only a year.*



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*The larger Morris LD2 registered 624 GTM was altogether a more attractive and presentable minibuss as can be seen from this photograph.*



*The four twelve-seater Commer 1500 minibusses looked smart in Country Lion's lovat green and white livery. SNH 534, 532, 533 and 536 have been lined up for their photographs to be taken.*

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*In this view the rear ends of the four Commer 1500s can be seen.*

Lion Services held a Road Service Licence to operate a stage-carriage service between Northampton, Derngate and the Avon Cosmetics site at Nunn Mills Road. Palmerston immediately applied to the Traffic Commissioners to take over this service and a new licence was granted under reference TER 5693/1 for this Monday to Saturday works/office shuttle service. In December 1968 Palmerston Garage applied to the Commissioners for permission to use forty-one seater coaches on this service as well as the 12/14 seaters currently in use. If the Company had a forty-one seater at this date details of it are at present unknown as full-sized vehicles are not recorded in the fleet until 1978, some ten years later.

Having acquired Country Lion Palmerston Garage wasted no time in adding a couple of new vehicles to the fleet in 1967. In January of that year an Austin LDM30 van converted to a fourteen-seater bus by Martin Walter Ltd was registered as EVV 808E, whilst in June 1967 a Martin Walter converted Ford Transit van seating twelve passengers joined the fleet as FVV 888E.

The fleet remained pretty well static for the next couple of years until in 1970 it was decided to retire the original four Commer machines along with a recently acquired



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*These BMC vans made quite attractive minibuses as is shown by EVV 808E, an Austin/Martin Walter fourteen seater.*



*In contrast to EVV 808E the somewhat smaller twelve-seater Ford Transit/Martin Walter conversion is represented by FVV 888E.*

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Ford Transit registered JNH 222F. A new Wadham Stringer converted Ford Transit - ONH 38J - probably replaced JNH 222F mentioned above, which may have been traded in part exchange. Two used Morris minibuses seating eleven and twelve passengers respectively were bought from the local operator H Baker of Southfield Road, Old Duston. Whether or not Palmerston Garage took over Baker's business at this time is not clear, but Baker ceased operating at this point. The two Morris vehicles were registered FVV 747E and GVV 869F. The final acquisition of 1970 came in September when a secondhand Martin Walter converted Ford Transit that had previously been used by a Scunthorpe operator was purchased. This was NTM 205H and it seated a dozen passengers. At the end of 1970 the Country Lion fleet totalled seven minibuses.



*GVV 869F was one of two Morris minibuses to be obtained from H Baker of Old Duston.  
(Photo courtesy T Richardson).*

It was in June 1971 that Palmerston Garage decided that a larger capacity coach would enhance the Company's ability to cater for customer needs when a van-based minibus was perhaps not entirely appropriate. Accordingly a Bedford J2SZ10 chassis was sourced onto which a most attractive Plaxton Embassy IV body was mounted. The resulting coach seated twenty passengers in what was to all intents and purposes a scaled-down version of a full-sized conventional coach. It proved highly successful in the Country Lion fleet and remained in service until the bodywork was damaged in 1994, after which time it was stored and eventually sold for preservation in 1998.



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*Another used minibus bought by Palmerston Garage in 1970 was this Ford Transit registered NTM 205H, converted to bus format by Martin Walter of Folkestone.*

*(Photo courtesy T Richardson).*



*Above is the small Bedford J2SZ10 with diminutive Plaxton Embassy coachwork seating twenty passengers and carrying the registration number PVV 888J.*

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*A rear view of PVV 888J when new in the summer of 1971*



*For good measure a coloured photograph of Bedford/Plaxton PVV 888J as it appeared in July 1994.*



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At the end of 1971 a secondhand Bedford J2SZ10 nineteen-seater was acquired but this time fitted with a Duple Midland body. It was registered AYV 40B, dating from 1964, but nonetheless gave Country Lion over two year's service. The following year, 1972, was comparatively quiet with just two older twelve-seat Ford Transits being replaced by two new models registered TVV 222K and TVV 333K. From 1973 to 1975 the business continued to tick over satisfactorily with the intake of ten vehicles, three of which had increased seating capacities to twenty-nine, being counterbalanced by the withdrawal of seven older machines. Thus by the end of 1975 the Country Lion fleet total was eleven vehicles.

Palmerston Garage seemed particularly successful in gaining contracts for the transport of disabled and special needs students and adults between their homes and places of learning or work. Such establishments as Greenfields, Fairfields and Northgate Schools, the Nene and Shire Training Centres as well as the Nimbus Laboratory all featured in Palmerston's contracts portfolio over the years. Another important contract was to convey workers to and from the Norde Suspension factory at Sywell.

The year 1976 was a notable one in the development of Palmerston Garage as on 10th June 1976 both Arch Bull and Alan Penn resigned from the Board and relinquished their Shareholdings. From the same date Alan Penn's 484 Ordinary and 750 Preference Shares were allotted to John Bull as also were 334 Ordinary and 750 Preference Shares previously held by Arch Bull. The remaining 150 Ordinary Shares held by Arch Bull were allotted to Anne Rosemary Bull who was John Bull's wife. Incidentally Anne Bull was also one of the firm's drivers.

At this same time the minibus fleet was rapidly expanded by seven vehicles in 1976, four in 1977 and another three in 1978. The 1976 intake comprised eight new Ford Transits with conversions being carried out by a variety of coachbuilders and variously seating between twelve and sixteen passengers; plus a twenty-nine seater Bedford VAS5 mounted with a Duple Dominant body, that was purchased secondhand. Outgoing were a couple of older Ford Transits.



*Representing the 1976 intake of Ford Transits is PRP 888R which was converted to a twelve seater bus by Moseley. This photograph was taken on a site in Victoria Road, Northampton that was rented by Palmerston Garage at this time to accommodate its growing fleet.*

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Another four new Ford Transits were taken into stock during 1977 along with a used twenty-seat Bedford J2SZ10 with Caetano bodywork that had formerly been in the ownership of Geoff Amos Coaches of Eydon. Finally the Company's first full-sized conventional coach was acquired secondhand and this was a forty-five seater Bedford YRQ with Duple Dominant bodywork and registered JAH 984N.



*Bedford YRQ/Duple Dominant JAH 984N was Country Lion's first full-sized coach and was clearly in good condition when purchased secondhand by Palmerston Garage.*

The purchase of a full-sized coach in 1977 led to the acquisition of Overstone Coaches of Sywell when in March 1978 this operator's three Bedford machines were taken over along with the firm's contracts and private hire customer list. The oldest of the three Bedfords was a VAL70 model with fifty-two seat Plaxton coachwork, whilst the other two were both YRT types with Duple Dominant bodies seating fifty-three. Other acquisitions during 1978 were two new Ford Transits, a twenty-nine seat Bedford VAS and a fifty-three seat Ford R1114. Outgoing were a twenty-seater Bedford J2SZ10, two Ford Transits and the Bedford VAL70 acquired earlier in the year from Overstone Coaches but some ten years old.



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On the left is SWP 734F a Bedford VAL70 with Plaxton coachwork whilst on the right is NTG 18L which was a Duplex Dominant bodied Bedford YRT. Both were photographed whilst still in Overstone Coaches' ownership. (Photos courtesy Eric Ayres).



RPT 5M was a Ford R1114 Duplex Dominant bodied coach bought secondhand by Country Lion in December 1978. It is seen here working on a Northants County Council contract from Guilsborough School. Note the "Country Lion Minicoaches" legend below the windscreen, even though the fleet contained a number of conventional coaches by the time RPT 5M was acquired.

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Thus by the end of 1978 the Country Lion fleet had grown to twenty-five vehicles and the reliance on minibus operation had begun the almost inevitable slide towards vehicles of higher seating capacity.

The rapid growth of the bus and coach operations in the mid to late 1970s steered John Bull towards the conclusion that the future of Palmerston Garage lay in the expansion of the public service vehicle fleet rather than in car sales and repairs and the retailing of petrol from a small garage located in a residential area of the older part of Northampton. Accordingly that part of the business detailed above was phased out during the latter years of the 1970s decade and the administration of the passenger fleet transferred from Denmark Road to Palmerston Road. Concurrently Northampton County Borough Council was looking to introduce a traffic management scheme in the Palmerston Road area and their proposals included the compulsory purchase of 85/87 Palmerston Road for demolition. This in turn meant that Palmerston Garage needed to seek a new location from which to trade and accordingly a fairly large site on the St James' Mill Road Industrial Estate was purchased to provide a new home for Palmerston Garage. Thus the move was made from Palmerston Road, Denmark Road and Victoria Road to St James in April 1979.

During 1979 a pair of Bedford VAS5 chassis mounted with twenty-nine seat Duple Dominant bodies and registered EVV 7T and FVV 10T respectively were taken into stock along with another three Ford Transits which collected the index marks EVV 8T and 9T and LBD 11V. In addition a further secondhand Bedford VAS5 was acquired registered LKO 527P. These six vehicles saw the demise of a corresponding number of twenty-nine seater Bedfords and a pair of Ford Transits.



*EVV 7T was one of Country Lion's Duple Dominant bodied Bedford VAS5 twenty-nine seater coaches bought new in 1979 and it was retained for four years.*



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The rolling stock programme for 1980 called for the purchase of another four Ford Transits, two with Dormobile bodies and two with Tricentrol conversions. In addition a forty-nine seat Ford R1114 was acquired secondhand and this time with a Plaxton Supreme body rather than the usual Duple Dominant product chosen by Palmerston Garage. Outgoing from the fleet were three Ford Transit minibuses.



*The secondhand Plaxton Supreme bodied Ford R1114 mentioned above was registered MAW 345P and can be seen in this illustration.*

January 1981 started well for Palmerston Garage as three Ford Transits, a Bedford VAS5 and a Ford R1114 were all delivered new to the Company during the month. The three Transits - VNV 4W, VNV 17W and VNV 18W each carried sixteen-seat Dormobile bodies. The Bedford VAS5 model - VBD 15W - was mounted with Plaxton coachwork whilst the Ford VBD 16W was fitted with a Duple body.

Having moved from Palmerston Road to St James' Mill Road in 1979 and trading as Country Lion the company title "Palmerston Garage (Northampton) Ltd" seemed rather out of place in the 1980s. The Company's Registered Office had been changed to St James' Mill Road in July 1980 and at an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Board held on 3rd March 1981 it was resolved that the name of the company be changed to "Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd".

By this time the fleet size of Country Lion had risen to some thirty-two or thirty-three vehicles. Its growth from six minibuses acquired some fifteen years earlier gives some indication of the commercial acumen of those running the business and, in particular, to John Bull who oversaw the rapid development of the mid-1970s.

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*VNV 4W, a 1981 Ford Transit/Dormobile sixteen seater looks immaculate as it stands in the sun.*



*Duple built a Dominant coach body for fitment to this Ford R1114 chassis which was delivered to Palmerston Garage as VBD 16W.*





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		MAKE	TYPE	NUMBER	MAKE	TYPE & SEATS	NUMBER	NEW	S/H	W/D			
927 DTM		Morris	J2	J2BM78480	Morris	B11C		6/61	10/66	10/67	Lion Services (Northampton) Ltd		
624 GTM		Morris	LD2	LD255156	Kenex	B14F		9/62	10/66	6/74	Lion Services (Northampton) Ltd		
SNH 532		Commer	1500	LB228153	Harrington	B12C	CO111	9/63	10/66	8/70	Lion Services (Northampton) Ltd		
SNH 533		Commer	15900	LB228126	Harrington	B12C	CO112	9/63	10/66	8/70	Lion Services (Northampton) Ltd		
SNH 534		Commer	1500	LB226217	Harrington	B12C	CO114	9/63	10/66	8/70	Lion Services (Northampton) Ltd		
SNH 536		Commer	1500	LB228225	Harrington	B12C	CO113?	9/63	10/66	8/70	Lion Services (Northampton) Ltd		
EVV 808E		Austin	LDM30	76996	Martin Walter	B14R		1/67	—	6/71	—	King, Glossop	
FVV 888E		Ford	Transit	BC05BE 49983	Martin Walter	B12F		6/67	—	5/72	—		
JNH 222F		Ford	Transit	BC05HA 25410	Ford	B12F		6/68	—	9/70	—	Parker, Littleborough	
ONH 38J		Ford	Transit	BC05KY 53633	Wadham Stringer	B12F		8/70	—	10/73	—	Barfoot & Rowsell, Westend	
FVV 747E		Morris	J2M16	163237	Morris	B11F		7/67	8/70	5/74	Baker, Duston		
GVV 869F		Morris	250JU	2252	Morris	B12F		1/68	8/70	6/74	Baker, Duston		
NTM 205H		Ford	Transit	BC05JG 58847	Martin Walter	B12F		1/70	9/70	8/72	Stringer, Scunthorpe	Hargreaves, Newbury	
PVV 888J		Bedford	J2SZ10	OT162152	Plaxton	C20F	712003	6/71	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
AYV 40B		Bedford	J2SZ10	195343	Embassy IV Duple	C19F	CFJ2/257/ 64806	6/64	12/71	4/74	Williams, Buckingham	Louth Methodist Church	
TVV 222K		Ford	Transit	BC05MB 59809	Midland Dormobile	B12F		6/72	—	8/77	—	Express, Rugby	
TVV 333K		Ford	Transit	BC05MR 44543	Wadham Stringer	B12F		5/72	—	7/74	—	James, London W7	

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		MAKE	TYPE	NUMBER	MAKE	TYPE & SEATS	NUMBER	NEW	S/H	W/D			
	JNK 129G	Bedford	VAS5	9T466973	Duple Vista 25	C29F	1223/30	6/69	2/73	2/79	North Star, Stevenage	Wing, Sleaford	
	SNB 192J	Ford	Transit	BC05LL 50665	Wadham Stringer	B12F		6/71	8/73	5/75	Crabbe, Stockton	Gentle, Ashwell	
	YNH 801M	Ford	Transit	BD05MY 68729	Tricentrol	B12F		8/73	—	8/77	—	Hall, Coventry	
	TUM 402H	Bedford	VAS5	9T470100	Duple Vista 25	C29F	1223/60	8/69	9/73	8/79	Prentice, W Calder	Alpine, Woking	
	ONH 444M	Ford	Transit	BD05NK 59024	Tricentrol	B12F		4/74	—	4/76	—	Clarkson, Dinnington	
	RXG 983H	Bedford	VAS5	0T477111	Plaxton Panorama	C29F	708076	4/70	6/74	6/79	Bobs, Middlesbrough	Clarke, Burbage	
	PVV 56N	Ford	Transit	BD05ND 63920	Dormobile	B16F		9/74	—	1/79	—	Jordan, Stourport	
	VTM 786K	Ford	Transit	BC05LU 44138	Luton Com Motors	B12F		4/72	12/74	4/76	Tricentrol, Dunstable	Richardson, Wickersley	
	HTD 649F	Bedford	J2SZ10	102706	Plaxton Embassy IV	C20F	688021	1/68	5/75	6/78	Robinson, Oakington	Bailey, Sutton-in-Ashfield	
	PMJ 842J	Ford	Transit	BC05KB 55965	Luton Com Motors	B12F		11/70	8/75	11/78	Kids Charity Home, Easton Maudit	Sapwell, Emberton	
	NBD 555P	Ford	Transit	BD05RU 62990	Moseley Envoy	B12F	456	4/76	—	10/78	—	Mott, Upton	
	NNH 555P	Ford	Transit	BD05RM 64409	Moseley Envoy	B12F	465	4/76	—	6/79	—	Bexleyheath Transport	
	RWD166M	Bedford	VAS5	DW453072	Duple Dominant	C29F	412/1247	4/74	5/76	4/81	Shirley, Meriden	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
	PNH 888R	Ford	Transit	BD05SA 65094	Dormobile	B16F	5080	8/76	—	1/81	—	Haywood & Prosser, Coventry	
	PNV 333R	Ford	Transit	BD05SA 57180	Dormobile	B12F	4727	8/76	—	3/81	—	Coventry Pincombe, Rackenford	
	PRP 888R	Ford	Transit	BD05SR 65660	Moseley Envoy	B12F		9/76	—	2/80	—	Dunn & Marks, Greenford	
	PRP 999R	Ford	Transit	BD05SG 67285	Dormobile	B16F		9/76	—	1/81	—		
	PVV 220R	Ford	Transit	BD05SG 51654	Tricentrol	B12F		9/76	—	3/80	—	Hawke, Coventry	

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		MAKE	TYPE	NUMBER	MAKE	TYPE & SEATS	NUMBER	NEW	S/H	W/D			
1	RBD 666R	Ford	Transit	BD05SD 59730	Dormobile	B12F		10/76	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
	RVV 1R	Ford	Transit	BD05SE 61076	Dormobile	B12F	5174	1/77	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
2	LBD 94P	Bedford	J2SZ10	DW114322	Caetano Faro II	C20F	75/30	8/75	3/77	4/81	Amos, Eydon	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
	TBD 2R	Ford	Transit	BD05SS 57242	Tricentrol	B12F		4/77	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
3	TBD 3R	Ford	Transit	BD05ST 61558	Tricentrol	B12F		4/77	—	3/80	—	Stone, Wilton	
4	JAH 984N	Bedford	YRQ	EW452272	Duple Dominant	C45F	416/2637	1/75	7/77	4/81	Wagg, Gaywood	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
	WVW 4S	Ford	Transit	BD05TR 68985	Dormobile	B16F		10/77	—	1/81	—	Springham, Orpington	
5	SWP 734F	Bedford	VAL70	7T452295	Plaxton Panorama	C52F	688622	4/68	3/78	11/78	Overstone, Sywell	Lockbray, SE1	
	NTG 18L	Bedford	YRT	2T477194	Duple Dominant	C53F	273/1596	4/73	3/78	10/	Overstone, Sywell	Reynolds, Caistor	
6	UHX 10M	Bedford	YRT	CW458896	Duple Dominant	C53F	417/3046	10/73	3/78	1/81	Overstone, Sywell	Crusader, B Stortford	
	VNK 786N	Bedford	VAS5	DW456156	Duple Dominant	C29F	412/1279	9/74	4/78	2/81	Myall, Bassingbourn	Low, Tomintoul	
5	DNH 5T	Ford	Transit	BDVVUJ 40446	Tricentrol	B12F		9/78	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
7	DVV 6T	Ford	Transit	BDVVUJ 43028	Tricentrol	B12F		10/78	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
	RPT 5M	Ford	R1114	BC04NK 61367	Duple Dominant	C53F	423/4527	2/74	12/78	4/81	John, Llanharry	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
8	EVV 7T	Bedford	VAS5	HW458152	Duple Dominant	C29F	912/1073	1/79	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
	EVV8T	Ford	Transit	BDVPUJ 44341	Dormobile	B16F	2028	1/79	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
9	EVV 9T	Ford	Transit	BDVPUM 46837	Dormobile	B16F	2928	1/79	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
	FVV 10T	Bedford	VAS5	JW452167	Duple Dominant	C29F	912/1074	3/79	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	

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		MAKE	TYPE	NUMBER	MAKE	TYPE & SEATS	NUMBER	NEW	S/H	W/D			
	LBD 11V	Ford	Transit	BDVZWD 313750	Tricentrol	B12F		8/79	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
	LKO 527P	Bedford	VAS5	CW454282	Duple Dominant	C29F	512/1059	10/75	11/79	4/81	Smith, Sittingbourne	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
12	NNV 10V	Ford	Transit	BDVPWS 410330	Dormobile	B16F	5601	1/80	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
13	NNV 13V	Ford	Transit	BDVVWY 517870	Tricentrol	B12F		1/80	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
14	NVV 14V	Ford	Transit	BDVVWL 436100	Tricentrol	B12F		2/80	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
3	PRP 3V	Ford	Transit	BDVVAB 352560	Dormobile	B12F	3195	6/80	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
	MAW 345P	Ford	R1114	BC04RK 63323	Plaxton Supreme	C49F	7611FC 032	4/76	10/80	4/81	Dickson, S Mandeville	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
4	VNV 4W	Ford	Transit	BDVPAL 332320	Dormobile	B16F	7633	1/81	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
15	VBD 15W	Bedford	VAS5	KW452401	Plaxton Supreme	C29F	80PJK 024	1/81	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
16	VBD 16W	Ford	R1114	BCRSAR 517900	Duple Dominant	C53F	023/4558	1/81	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
17	VNV 17W	Ford	Transit	BDVPAL 332330	Dormobile	B16F	7634	1/81	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	
18	VNV 18W	Ford	Transit	BDVPAL 332340	Dormobile	B16F	7635	1/81	—	4/81	—	Country Lion (Northampton) Ltd	

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