



Epsom Coaches reach the Diamond Jubilee milestone

Not many coach companies make use of a computer in their operations, but Epsom Coaches, of Epsom, Surrey, are one of those who do.

In their case, the wages are done by computer, and for this purpose the firm is departmentalised too.

"It reduces tedious work all the time" said Epsom's Managing Director, Roy Richmond "and it even tells you how many one pence pieces and five pound notes to draw. It automatically does the year-end certificates, the P60s, as well".

It is not really surprising to hear Roy talk about a computer, for Epsom Coaches are an extremely well-organised and well-run firm.

They were started in 1920 in Epsom by Roy's father, H.R. Richmond. Roy's father was a qualified engineer who during the first world war worked on aircraft production and then when the war was over found himself unemployed for nine months. He therefore decided to invest some money and started a firm operating coaches and horse-boxes. By the time of the outbreak of the second world war he had six of each.

Of these 12 vehicles, 11 were commandeered by the Army during the war and Mr. Richmond carried on with one coach transporting workers and prisoners of war. In the early 1940s all track of those 11 vehicles was lost, and although he was eventually paid by the Army he lost a lot of money over the incident.

However, despite being almost knocked out in the war by these events he started to rebuild the firm in 1945.

He operated both coaches and horse-boxes until 1952, when he gave up running horse-boxes. "Although delicensing had not yet come in the writing was on the wall that the trainers would start to buy their own horse-boxes, and restricted 'B' licences were already coming in" said Roy.

"Coaches were on allocation in those days and we were getting about one or two a year. In a good year we would get two".

After the war, the firm bought ex-Belfast City buses with utility bodies. They stripped the bodies off and replaced them with Duple coachwork. Two of these vehicles were obtained for use as horse-boxes, and two for use as

coaches in those days.

"At that time father bought Mortons, Crossleys, AECs and Bedfords, although Bedfords were harder to come by" Roy recalled.

Roy, the second son, came into the firm in 1947 when he came out of the army, and now his own sons have followed him into the business. Christopher, the Tours Director, came in 1969, and Andrew, the Transport Director, entered the firm in 1971.

Today the fleet list details 49 coaches. Of these 34 are Leylands, five are Bedfords, eight are Bristols and two are Mercedes.

Why the emphasis on Leylands? "Reliability" Roy replied. "We had a bad experience of the lighter chassis with the type of work which we do, and we also felt we needed to streamline the stores.

"We went in for standardisation as we could not store the parts seven years ago. We had about 20 chassis-body combinations then, so when we standardised we decided to standardise on Plaxton bodywork at the same time.



(Above left) To mark the occasion of Epsom Coaches Diamond Jubilee Mr. D. Goodare, (centre) Sales Administrator/Coach Divisional Director, presented Andrew Richmond (right) with a set of crystal decanters.

(Above right) The attractive frontage of Epsom Coaches premises on the Longmead Industrial Estate. They have just under an acre and a half on a 99 years lease.

(Below) Epsom Coaches vehicles are housed in a purpose-built garage with full maintenance facilities only 16 miles from central London.

(Bottom) There is very easy access to, and exit from, their Longmead Industrial Estate premises for Epsom Coaches, as this picture clearly shows.



"Also at that time we had some Leylands on trial and had a good experience of them. In fact we are still running those three trial coaches. Two of them have done over 250,000 miles with the original engine without a major overhaul.

"We have been standardising for about five years now. At the moment we are operating a policy of replacing light vehicles with heavy".

The fleet includes two 18 seater 1980 Reeve Burgess Mercedes, and eight 33 seater Plaxton Supreme Bristol LHS coaches which range in years from 1978 to 1975.

There are three Bedford YRQ 41 seaters and two Bedford YRT 50 seaters, along with two Leyland Leopard 50 seaters and 12 Leyland Leopards with 50 recliners. These latter date from 1976 to 1980. The rest of the fleet comprise Leyland Leopard 55 seaters, dating from 1973 to 1979.

Roy and Andrew say their work is everything except stage carriage. They say that they like to do all types of work so that if any sector is not doing particularly well this is balanced out by another doing better.



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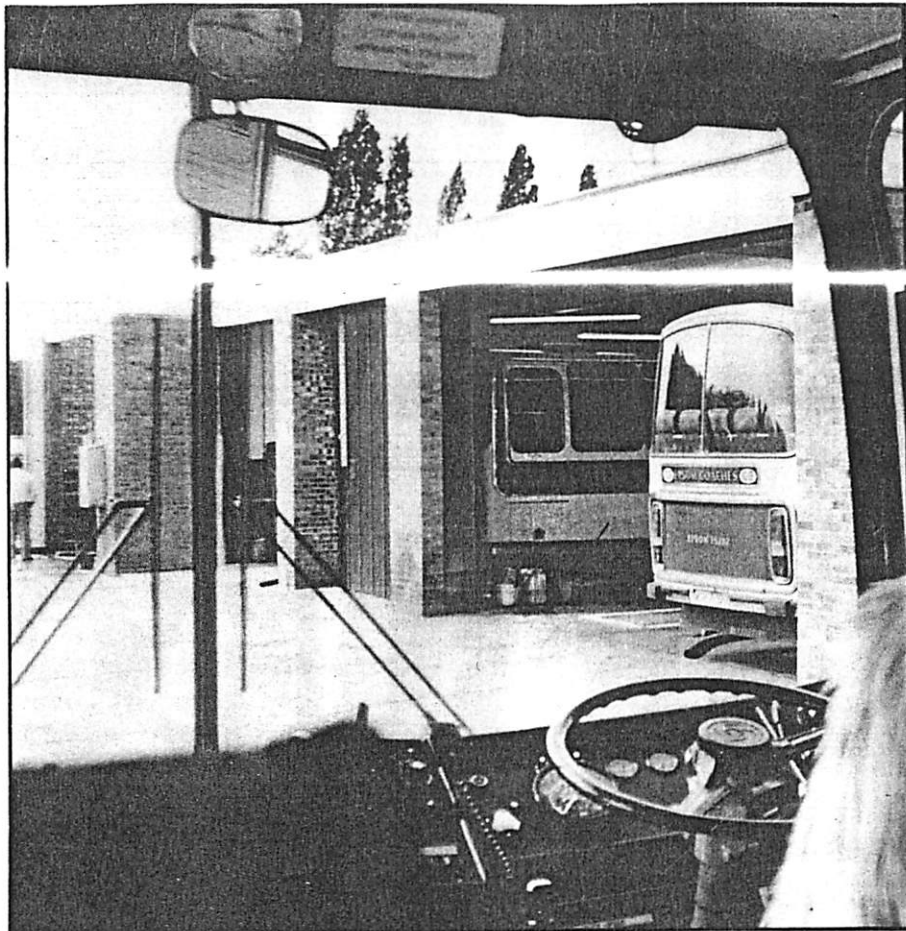
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All the sign-writing on the coaches, including all the legal requirements, is done on the premises by a system of transfers. It is quicker and cheaper than the traditional method.



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Each coach is fully serviced every 6,000 miles, and, on average, one coach a week goes through its MOT test.

They can do towing in and repair work for other operators and are part of the mutual aid scheme which the CIBS run.

They have a training scheme for their drivers. This comes under the RTITB scheme and they have two instructors who have done the MOTEK Training Course. If they think that a driver shows potential they will put him on a ten day course, and in any case they always assess a man's driving ability prior to employing him, taking him out on a test drive.

Every driver, including every part-time driver, is re-assessed every year.

"It is not easy to get staff in this area, but it is not impossible" said Roy.

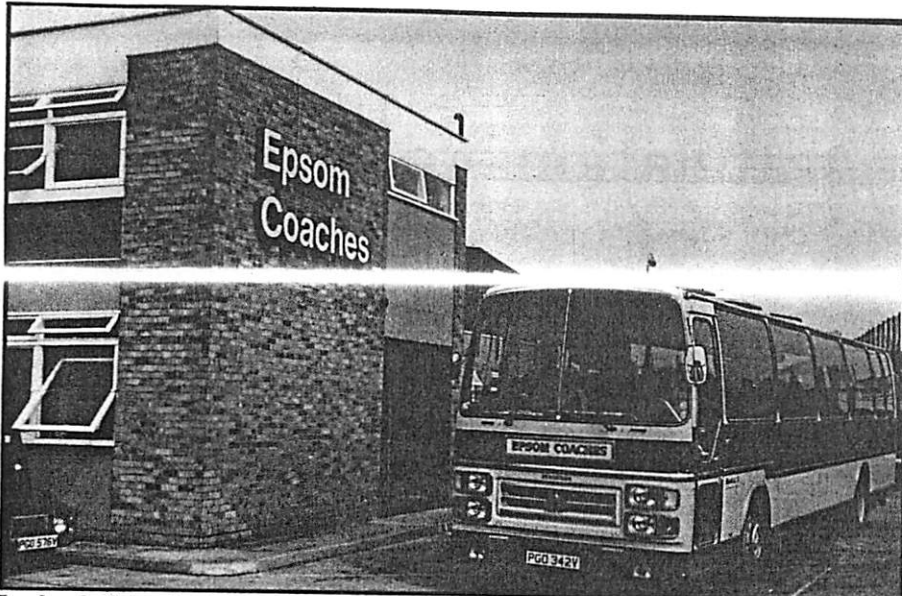
Roy and Andrew were asked in what ways they felt coaching as a whole could be improved in the future.

Andrew felt it might be better to have a central depot to which to take the coach for its COF. He wondered if inspectors visited premises which were cleaner and more comfortable more often than premises which were dirty and did not offer the same degree of comfort, just because they were pleasanter to work in.

The firm's sign-writing is done by a transfer system. They use transfers produced by Eagle Transfers and they estimate it takes about seven or eight hours to sign-write a coach in this way compared to perhaps two days by hand, for all the legal writing is done by this method too. It is also a much cheaper system.

Epsom Coaches are a bonded tour operator, which means, said Roy, that the public are guaranteed on any of their tours.

"We have no outside representatives, but we advertise in the local weekly press" he said, talking about the firm's publicity work.



Leylands form the bulk of the fleet today. Why Leyland? "Reliability" replied Roy Richmond, Epsom coaches Managing Director.

"But our main publicity expenditure is by our own programmes, and we have about 90 agents throughout the Surrey area who have ticket books and can give tickets on the spot after consultation with the office".

How do Roy and Andrew see the future of the coach industry in general, for they had earlier said that their own plans were to go on as they were? They would not want to extend to over 50 coaches, or to cut back drastically either.

"We think there will be a certain amount of contraction of companies and work in the next 12 months, but not a very significant contraction" they replied.

Andrew thought that, because of greater restrictions, there would be less people coming into the industry with one coach and trying to build up their firm.

Both men felt that fleets would get slightly older because of the difficulty of replacement programmes in the

recession, and the crippling bank interest. "And yet" said Roy "having said that, coach firms seem to prosper in a recession because it is a cheap form of transport".

Roy said he would like to see the Traffic Commissioners visiting premises once every three years, and Andrew repeated that he would like to see a tightening up of the inspection system to achieve the same standard all through, and to make sure that that standard is a high one.

Epsom Coaches have obviously come a long way since H.R. Richmond, son of a Norfolk farmer and who served a seven year engineering apprenticeship in Scotland, founded them 60 years ago.

Their attractive brochure records that he leased a garage in Epsom High Street and that the first coaches he operated had canvas hoods and solid tyres.

Epsom Coaches moved into premises in South Street, Epsom, in 1934 where they stayed until 1971 to move into their present premises. During the early 1950s they took over Leatherhead Coaches and Bookham Saloon Coaches.

Their coaches now travel, claim the firm, approximately one and a half million miles every year. With such an efficient organisation behind them, there seems no reason why they should not do so for many more years to come.

We wish Epsom Coaches every success for the next 60 years.



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Happy family Roy Richmond (center) who heads Epsom Coaches is seen with his two sons and co-directors Christopher (left) and Andrew. They are the son and grandsons of the founder.



Not Gold but Diamond!

Epsom Coaches celebrate 60 good years

By John Speed

THIS YEAR quite a number of coach operators will be celebrating their Golden Jubilee, but keeping ahead as usual is Epsom Coaches who last month marked the achievement of their *Diamond Jubilee* (60 years), with an open day at their premises in Blenheim Road, Epsom.

Although the company has had its headquarters at this address for a good many years, the Jubilee afforded an opportunity to show off recent additions and extensions. But this was not all by a long chalk. Visitors, who included party organisers, customers, the trade and friends, were also able to attend a well-organised workshop with stands dressed and manned by staff from stately homes and attractions calculated to appeal to customers. Arranged in the new body shops, this useful exhibition was a smaller edition of the one held in London by the English Tourist Board the previous day.

Visitors—and there were nearly three hundred—were able to see not only the premises but the company's system of operation at work. Coaches were available for inspection and this open day demonstrated clearly why Epsom Coaches has long been a leader amongst the independent companies. A family concern if ever there was one, H. R. Richmond Ltd, proprietors of Epsom Coaches, is

now headed by the son of the founder, Roy Richmond, and his co-directors are his sons Christopher and Andrew with Mrs Richmond and daughter Rosemary.

There were rather more than 20 stands in the travel attractions exhibition and these were being besieged by many potential customers when I was there. The combination of an open day and travel workshop was a novel and excellent idea and the first time in my experience that such an event had been staged by one of the smaller operators.

The building extensions are the new body shops, one for repairs and the other a paint shop fully equipped with air extraction plant etc. An extra pit is provided in one of the shops. An extension to the main workshop building houses a new Wilcomatic washing machine. Nearby is the refuelling point so that vehicles can be washed and refuelled quickly and conveniently.

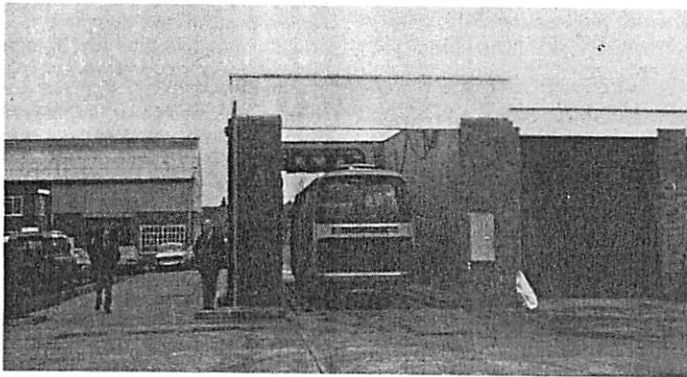
Each vehicle has its own key to the pump and by means of an electronic fuel metering device the amount used is automatically recorded on a register in the office which shows the quantity used by each vehicle separately.

The Wilcomatic washing machine is too well known to require description, but it is worth noting



A useful workshop with stands representing many attractions in the south was arranged in the new paintshops of Epsom Coaches on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee Open Day. Ready to greet visitors are (l to r) Heather Mount, Peter Gooch, Traffic Manager, and driver Peter Walsh.

New extensions have recently been built at the headquarters of Epsom Coaches in Blenheim Road, Epsom. On the right is the main office block, the entrance to the spacious garage and on the left of the picture the workshops. Below is seen the extension to the workshop which houses a new Wilcomatic washing machine. At the side is the car park and the new paintshops are at the rear of these buildings.



Below: A popular stand in the workshop was that of Drusillas of Alfriston. A glass of mead, some home-baked bread and a piece of cheese supported the sales talk of Drusillas staff. Bottom: Roy Richmond chats to some visitors who were enjoying the workshop.

that it is easily operable by the driver who can himself fuel, wash and garage his coach ready for the next day's duties.

Another fairly recent addition to Epsom Coaches operations is the use of Pye two-way radio between drivers and the office. This has proved invaluable, particularly for airport transfers and reporting any delays, changes of duties and so on.

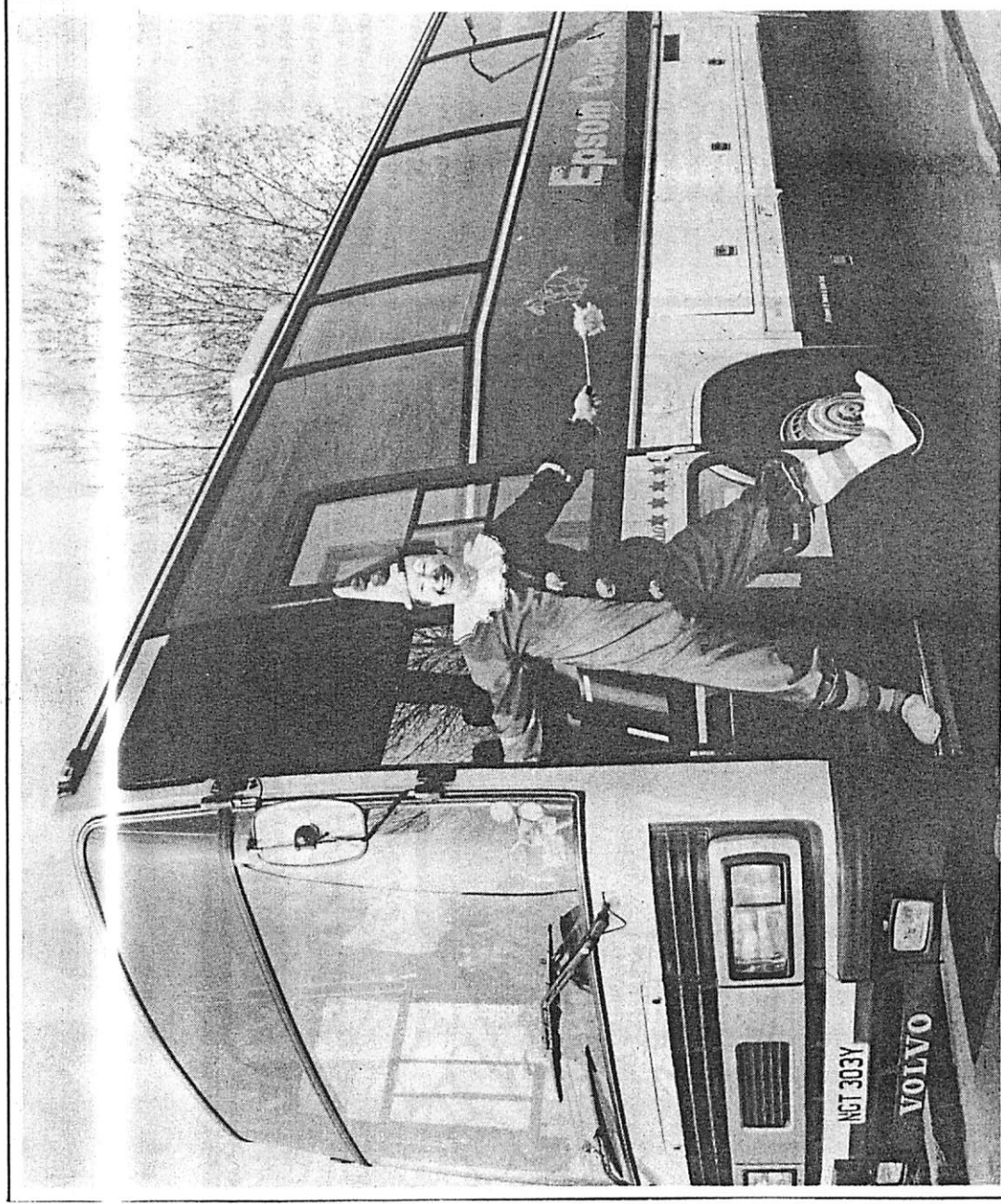
Also new is an extension to the driver's rest room which offers comfortable and spacious accommodation for off-duty times and as a reporting centre. Drivers were on duty during the open day and very smart they all looked—a reminder that smart drivers betoken a smart fleet. And a smart fleet in turn becomes a well maintained one. Inspection of the Epsom workshops and its activities confirms this belief.

For 1980, the company will have eight new coaches. Four of them will be Leyland Leopards with Plaxton 50-seat bodies. There will be two Bristol LHS models with Plaxton coachwork and two 18-seat Mercedes 508D coaches with Reeve Burgess bodywork.

With a total fleet of 49 vehicles and a highly efficient organisation behind them, Epsom Coaches have certainly something to celebrate on their Diamond Jubilee. The burghers of Epsom and the surrounding area are fortunate too, to be able to enjoy the first class facilities offered by this old established and highly respected operator.



ROAD/RAIL



Epsom Coaches' clowning glory...

Clowning around with Epsom Coaches seems to be one of the best ways to spend the Easter break. The coach company has put

together a range of Easter excursions, offering 19 different itineraries from a variety of local pick-up points.

Guardian 17/5/84 Coach trips to cover castles and cities

EXCURSIONS galore have been organised by Epsom Coaches in their latest programme which starts this month.

There are day, afternoon and evening trips, and express services to the coast, with a choice of tours on almost every day of the year.

In all, the firm is offering outings to 140 different destinations from historic cities, castles and houses, to river trips, shows, picnics, museums and factory visits.

Day trips venture as far as Bath, Blackpool

and Boulogne, while afternoon excursions are to places nearer home like Sussex or Kent.

And in the evening there are shows, meals and tours. The programme even includes a D-Day celebration "Dug-out experience".

Coastal express services go to 12 South Coast destinations. And Epsom Coaches also run holiday tours.

Brochures are available from local travel agents or directly from Epsom Coaches on Epsom 27821.

Coaching past and present

on display when Epsom Coaches hold an open day at their Blenheim Road, Epsom, headquarters on Saturday.

On show will be a 30 year old Bedford coach once owned by the company and recently discovered in South Devon.

Epsom policeman and coaching enthusiast, Geoff Heels, had restored it to its original condition.

By its side will be the coach of the future — a 44 seater built to Epsom Coaches own specification and featuring TV and video, tea and coffee

washroom, air conditioning, and exceptional standards of comfort and visibility.

A mini-travel fair featuring more than 20 tourist attractions, mainly on the South-East, will also be featured.

Epsom Coaches is still a family run concern and is now the largest independent operator in Surrey.

During the morning there will be a performance by the St Mary's Morris Dancers and in the afternoon the Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Coun Bill Carpenter, will pay a visit.

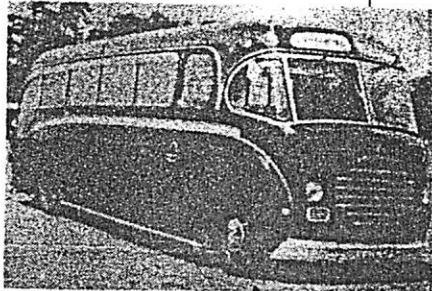


Above: Previously the Epsom Coaches fleet comprised nearly all Leyland-group products. However this year's deliveries are of Volvo B10Ms. The new flagship of the fleet is NGT 1Y, a luxurious Plaxton Paramount 3500 44-seat-bodied example. S. W. Stevens-Stratten

Successful tour

Epsom Coaches, Surrey's largest coach operators, had to put on extra capacity to meet the exceptional demand for the company's latest tour — to its own headquarters!

Well over 2 000 visitors came to Epsom for the company's Open Day, many taking advantage of a courtesy coach service from Ashted, Cheam, Kingston, Leatherhead, Morden, Tolworth, Sutton and Wimbledon as well as from Epsom and Ewell.



As well as a line-up of the fleet of 45 coaches which operate Epsom Coaches holiday tours throughout the UK and Europe, there was a Travel Fair in which some two dozen local tourist attractions from various parts of the south east took part. The crowds of visitors were shown every aspect of coaching operations, from the computerised seat reservation system to the automatic coach wash which handles the vehicles at the rate of one every five minutes. They learned that the Epsom Coaches fleet covers 1.5 million miles annually (equivalent to three round trips to the moon) and that the cost of a set of tyres for a modern coach is over £1 500.

Epsom Coaches Ltd
Blenheim Rd, Epsom, Surrey
KT19 9AF (03737 25252)

The company's newest coach had arrived just in time for the Open Day in the early hours of the morning — a Grand Touring coach with Plaxton's coachwork on a Volvo chassis, with air conditioning,

Three trips to moon a year

EPSOM COACHES, Surrey's largest coach operators, had to put on extra capacity on Saturday to meet the exceptional demand for their latest tour — to their own headquarters.

Well over 2,000 visitors came to Epsom for the company's Open Day, many of them taking advantage of the courtesy coach services

The Blenheim Road headquarters wore a holiday air for the occasion with the drivers in their smart red blazers, the striped umbrellas in the open air refreshment area, and the lively display of Morris dancing.

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By its side was an Epsom Coach of the 1950s restored to its original condition by Epsom policeman and coaching enthusiast PC Geoff Heels who brought it in Devon three years ago for £150.

Among the Open Day visitors was one of the Company's first drivers, 79-year-old Mr William Tinker of Ewell, who joined them in 1921.

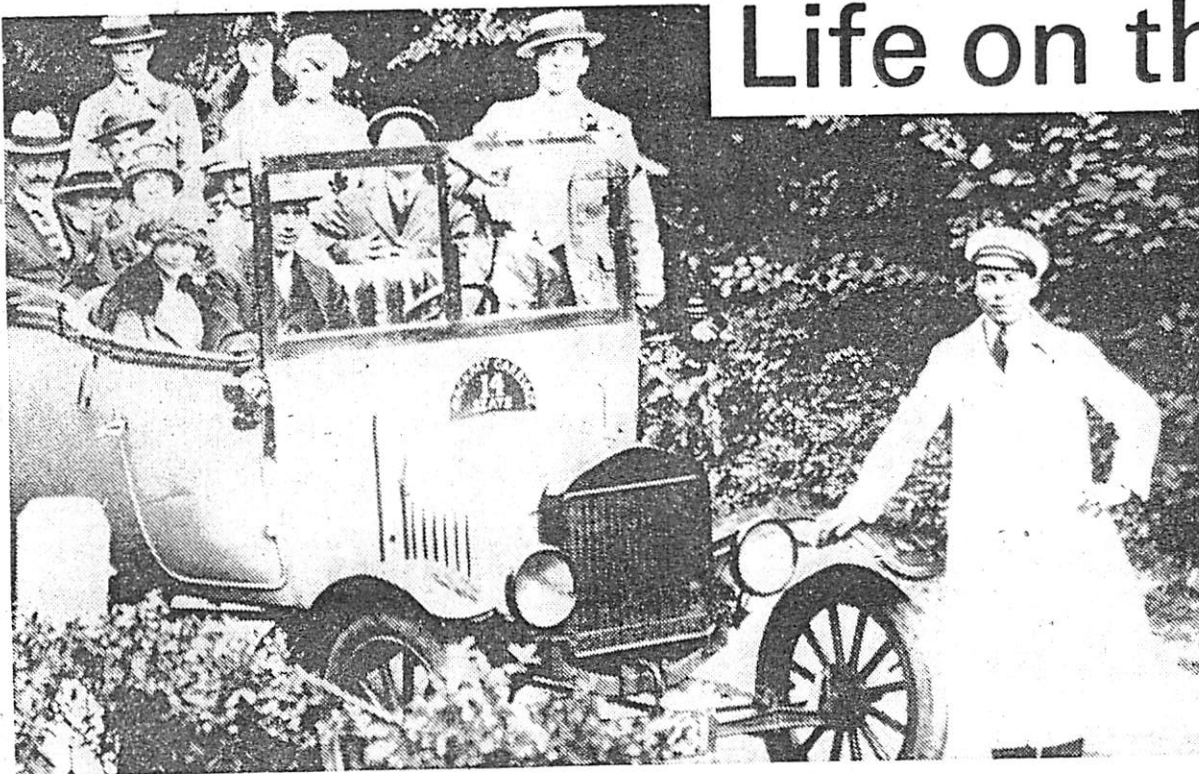
our ad with



Guardian

24/7/82

Life on the buses



King of the road . . . William Tinker in about 1921.

ONE of Epsom Coaches' original drivers when the company started over 100 years ago took a trip down memory lane on Saturday.

The occasion was an open day held at their Blenheim Road headquarters.

And among the 2,000 visitors was 70-year-old Mr William Tinker, who joined the company in 1921.

Mr Tinker cut quite a dash in those early days of coach travel as our photograph shows. That's him in the long white coat leaning nonchalantly on the mudguard.

A trip to Henley took ages and a day trip to Southsea was regarded as the ultimate in coaching adventure.

Mr Tinker left the company to become a driver in the RAF. But he only gave up motoring last year when the job and cost of servicing his Rover 90 became too much.

The oldest star of the open day was an Epsom coach of the 1950s which has been restored to its original condition by Epsom policeman and coaching enthusiast, Mr Geoff Heals.

Next to it was the company's newest acquisition — a grand touring coach with British coachwork on a Swedish chassis.

Its special features include air conditioning, toilet, washroom, video and TV, tea and coffee making facilities and a fridge.

The coach of the 1980s has cost the company nearly £90,000.

Below with Mr Heals are managing director Roy Richmond and Ernie Warwick who joined the firm in the late 'twenties.



EPSON AND EWELL HERALD OPEN DAY 19/3/83



EPSOM POLICEMAN Geoff Heels with the 30 year-old Bedford he has lovingly restored.

BUS AND COACH 16/3/83
Epsom on show

INDEPENDENT operator Epsom Coaches is to hold an open day at its Blenheim Road premises, Epsom, on Saturday, March 19.

Examples of past and present vehicles will be on display, and visitors will be able to see the company's computer booking systems, its offices and workshops.

Other attractions will include Morris dancers, glass engravers and a travel fair.

On parade 23/3/83

TWO PLAXTONS 3500 Volvo B10M coaches were delivered to Epsom Coaches, Surrey, just in time for the operator's open day on Saturday. More than 2,000 people, including many outings organisers, visited the garage and travel fair.

Coaches firm opens the doors

A MINI TRAVEL FAIR featuring more than 20 tourist attractions mainly in the South East, from Broadlands to the Bluebell Railway, will be one of the highlights of an Open Day being given by Epsom Coaches in Epsom on Saturday.

It's free and a courtesy coach service will provide transport from Ashted, North Cheam, Epsom, Ewell, Kingston, Leatherhead, Mor-

den, Sutton, Tolworth and Wimbledon.

Among the attractions will be a 30-year-old Bedford once owned by the company and recently discovered in South Devon by Epsom policeman and coaching enthusiast Pc Geoff Heels who has restored it to its original condition.

By the side of this memory of the past will be a coach of the future, a 44-seater of the grand touring class built to

Epsom's Coaches' own specification and featuring TV/Video, tea/coffee facilities, toilet/washroom, air conditioning and exceptional standards of comfort.

Still a family-run concern, Epsom Coaches is now the largest independent coach operator in Surrey and the open day is an invitation to the public to take a look behind the scenes.

They will see the operations room and the workshops and watch a computer handling the booking procedures for the company's wide range of UK and Continental holiday tours.

Other sections feature the express coach services, private hire and the company's history.

Epsom Coaches cover a total of 1.5-million miles a year, equivalent to three round trips to the moon; and consume 150,000 gallons of fuel annually, enough to keep the average family motorist going for 450 years.

The open day is being held at the Company's headquarters in Blenheim Road on the Longmead Estate from 10.00 am until 5.00 pm.

Tea and biscuits will be served and every visitor will be entitled to a free ticket in a raffle, the first prize for which is a day trip to France for two - details of the courtesy service telephone Epsom 2700.

THE ADVERTISER MARCH 17TH 1983

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Over 32,000 free copies in Epsom, Ewell, Ashtead, Langley Vale, Cuddington, Stoneleigh.

Epsom & Ewell Advertiser

No. 5963

Thursday, May 26, 1983

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Driver races to the rescue of kidney patient

Coach in mercy dash

AN EPSOM coach driver played a vital part in a cross-channel mercy dash at the weekend. Peter Cobb was involved in a race against time to get a kidney patient back to London in time for a transplant operation.

As soon as the ferry docked the coach was given priority through the docks, including a special customs clearance and Peter put his foot down to make the fastest time possible to a pre-arranged rendezvous with a police car.

There, Mr Tompkins was transferred into the police vehicle which raced to Dulwich in an hour and seven minutes.

Mr Tompkins was operated on and initial reports said the transplant appeared to have been successful.

Mr Christopher Richmond, a director of Epsom Coaches, said this week paid tribute to what he called "a tremendous ef-

fort" by Peter Cobb, "He could not have done better and we received a letter from the hospital commending his action," said Mr Richmond.

"I think Peter was quite moved by the incident and I know he and his wife sent a card to Mr Tompkins."

He added that Saturday's trip was one of several outings organised by the company for renal patients from several hospitals.

Peter Cobb, who has been driving for the firm for three and a half years, said that with the help of the police and customs at Dover, he had cleared the harbour area "in one minute flat."

"I am very pleased about the way things went."

by CHRIS HARDING

Day trip to new kidney

EPSOM HERALD
26/5/83

A KIDNEY patient had some wonderful news on the way home from a French trip

Forty minutes from Dover, a vital message came over the ship-to-shore radio — the hospital had found him a kidney.

Sean Tomkins, 30, a patient at Dulwich hospital was thrilled — but he only had three hours to get to the hospital.

Sean was with a party of patients on the way home from a trip to Boulogne on Saturday. He was rushed off the ship at Dover, through customs without stopping, and into a waiting police car.

So successful were their efforts, Sean was in the operating theatre in one hour seven minutes!

He is now "doing well" and the surgeon who per-

formed the operation is optimistic the kidney will "take".

Epsom Coaches driver, Peter Cobb, 52, has sent Sean a card. So have Epsom Coaches.

Director Chris Richmond said: "Nothing quite like that has happened before, although we have carried kidney patients. It was a very pleasant 'hitch' and it's wonderful everything

worked out for the best".

Sean had been on a trip to France to look around the shops. The patients also had a meal in the country.

Said Sean: "Next time they have a trip, if there is any likelihood of a kidney being found for a patient, I wish they would let us know.

"Then we can take home three times the amount of duty frees without any questions!"

LETTERS

THE SUNDAY EXPRESS May 16 1982

THE EDITOR, SUNDAY EXPRESS, FLEET STREET, LONDON, EC4P 4JT

by the "Lest We Forget Association."

Just as we were approaching home our young driver announced over the intercom that he hoped we had enjoyed the outing as much as he had, and that he considered it both a pleasure and an honour to have been our driver, and on behalf of his generation he would like to say: "Thank you gentlemen, for everything."

There was a moment's dead silence followed by an outburst of applause from us all. His simple announcement made our day.

"Jock" Gaffron
(Late Gordon Highlanders)
11, Erridge Road,
Merton Park,
London SW19.

The young speak

TH the Falklands much in mind our coach of fifty elderly and disabled ex-servicemen from two World Wars was returning from a tour of the lovely Sussex and Kent countryside, organised

Superb day, thanks

SIR: Having travelled on the trip to Boulogne that you organised with Epsom Coaches on Wednesday June 3 1981 we felt that we could not let this go by without relating to you how very pleased we were with the excellent organisation by Epsom Coaches and their Staff, including of course their drivers who made the whole event such a good day.

There are not many things today that people will say was 'good value for money' but everyone we spoke to concurred with our opinion of

the trip and we consider that for £15 it was excellent value. Trusting that you will repeat these trips in the future.

Yours sincerely,
IRIS JONES
for Frank & Iris Jones
96 Hartfield Road,
Wimbledon.

ROAD/RAIL

Epsom first with London-Nice direct

by Penny Comerford

EPSOM COACHES is to operate the first direct coach service to the French Riviera. Clients stay overnight in French hotels rather than travelling non-stop.

The licence was granted by the French and British transport ministries after much discussion. The authorities had been concerned about illegal services which had broken the drivers' hours regulations and left many clients stranded after going out of business.

French Leave presented a case for a credible scheduled service and was granted the licence, to be operated by Epsom and the French company, Cars Phocéens.

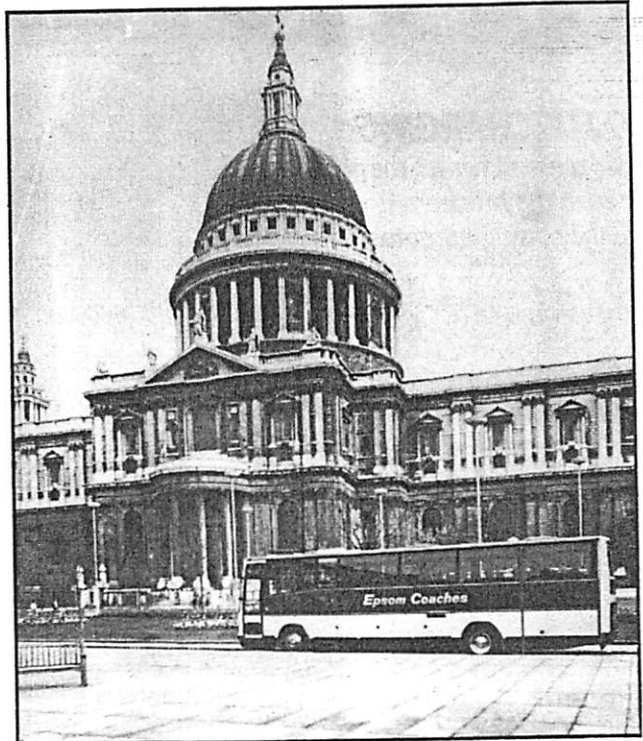
The Riviera Express will be launched on July 1 leaving London Victoria coach station every Friday morning and arriving in Nice the following evening. There will be connecting services for the rest of England.

Tickets will be sold through travel agents at 10% commission and also through National Express offices and Supabus. Fares are £60 single, £108 return during July and August, dropping to £55 and £98 for the rest of the year. This includes overnight hotel accommodation in France, Sealink ferry crossing and breakfast.

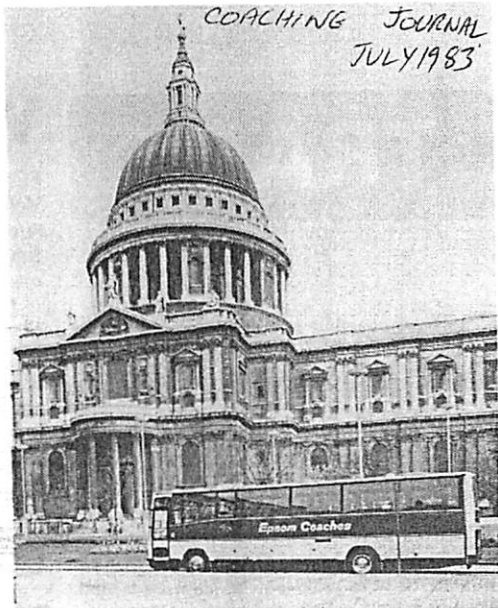
"This makes it the cheapest licensed direct link between London and the south of France," said a spokesman. The Apex air return is £178 and conventional rail return costs £131.50.

The service leaves Victoria at 9.45 and goes via Croydon, Dover, Calais, Orange, Aix-en-Provence, St Maxime and Cannes to Nice. Return coaches leave Nice on Saturday mornings at 8.30 and the service operates every week of the year except Christmas and New Year's Eve.

French Leave Holidays will arrange accommodation in France in connection with the coach service.



One of Epsom Coaches' newest type of touring coach which will be used on the Riviera Express service from July 1.



One of Epsom Coaches' Grand Touring coaches which is now operating the new Riviera Express service between UK and the south of France. Special features of the Volvo/Plaxton coaches include air conditioning, double glazing, toilet/washroom, tea/coffee making facilities and a refrigerator.

Breakfast coach to the Riviera

OVERNIGHT stops are offered to passengers travelling to Southern France on French Leave's Riviera Express.

Operated jointly by Epsom Coaches and Nice-based Cars Phocéens, the service leaves London's Victoria Coach Station on Friday nights from July 1 till March 30, 1984, with special services between December 19 and January 3.

Epsom Coaches' vehicles take passengers to Orange, including an overnight stop at an hotel on the route, and Car Phocéens take passengers from Orange to Aix-en-Provence, Cannes and Nice. Similar arrangements are made for the return journey.

Fare, including overnight accommodation and continental breakfast, is £55 single, £98 return, with supplements of £5 single and £10 return payable in July and August.

Travellers to the South of France now have the possibility of going by a new, scheduled coach express specially licensed by the French authorities. The author sampled the new service for the inaugural run, London to Nice.

FRIDAY, 10 am: Uneasily, I board the Riviera Express at Victoria Coach Station, remembering how sick I used to feel in coaches on school trips.

However, in a comfortable seat that reclines if I want it to, I settle down with a glass of champagne. The 44-seater coach is fully air-conditioned. At the rear is a kitchenette for dispensing tea, coffee and soft drinks. There is also a loo. School outings were never like this.

On the way to Dover and the cross-Channel ferry we are told the driving will be shared between our two cheerful chauffeurs, which is the proper procedure on a long trip, since a driver may legally do only eight hours on a journey of more than 17 hours, the shift being split into two four-hour periods with a rest period of 30 minutes in between.

Nice and easy

1 pm: Standing in the sun on the Sealink ferry, I can just see the coast of France. The sea is dead calm. After a cafeteria lunch of chicken salad and a glass of wine, I wander out on the uncrowded deck and sit reading my book.

3.30 pm: Unhindered by suitcases and bags, we join the coach on the ferry at Calais and take the short cut to the autoroute and Paris en route to the Burgundian town of Auxerre.

We travel steadily and smoothly at about 55 mph, the recently reduced speed limit for coaches in France. The police are reported to be making frequent checks on tachographs, a device that records the coach's speeds. Apparently, recent accidents involving coaches have had a long-overdue salutary effect.

At a late supper in a local wine cellar I enjoy a glass of cool Chablis and two tomatoes of which the stuffing seems to consist wholly of garlic, thus

ensuring two seats to myself tomorrow. Spend the night at the comfortable, if not luxurious, Hotel Mercure, on the outskirts of Auxerre. Passengers may share single or shared rooms at the time of original booking.

Saturday, 8 am: After a Continental breakfast, the cost included in the price of the ticket, we leave Auxerre. Tea and coffee are served on the move.

I sit contentedly gazing out of the window, my book unopened on my lap as we head on south through the vineyards of Beaune — heart of the wine country — past Macon and Lyon to Montelimar for lunch. The meal is passable, the breast of duck with a wine and vinegar sauce being especially good. Lunch is not normally included in the price of the coach ticket, but a stop is made at Orange where passengers can buy their own.

3 pm: We take a vote on a choice of six video films. "Casablanca" wins and I doze

off halfway through it. Waking up an hour or two later, I see the hills of Provence above us.

We leave the autoroute at about 6.30 pm so as to make a stop at the old university town of Aix-en-Provence. It is a relief to stretch one's legs during the 15-minute visit. Several passengers leave the coach here. Next stop is Ste Maxime, where we leave four more people in the town's square, then continue to Cannes and Nice.

There is a brief stop to allow more passengers off before we enter the outskirts of Nice at 8.50 p.m. For the last hour or two my thoughts have been mostly on the prospects of a bath and bed. But as we turn into the Promenade des Anglais with its hotels and cafes overlooking the sea, I feel wide awake and all thoughts of bed are banished.

After a quick shower in my hotel room I find a small cafe on the Promenade and have a very good supper of fresh seafood and white wine of Provence. The discomforts of school coach trips are long forgotten.

Caroline Bird

By coach, with care

WITH the spotlight on coach travel owing to crashes and court cases involving breaches of the EEC regulations, the inaugural run last week of the first direct London to Nice Riviera Express was a positive addition in this line of travel.

The Riviera Express leaves Victoria Coach Station at 9.45 a.m. every Friday and arrives (with an overnight hotel stop in Auxerre—which is included in the one-way fare of £55 and return of £98) at 8.45 p.m. the following evening.

That coach travel is under scrutiny was evident when we returned to Dover, where round-the-clock checks are carried out to ensure that drivers have complied with the hours of driving and rest periods laid down in EEC regulations. The senior traffic examiner at Dover said that, in his eight-hour watch, 100 coaches had passed through, 60 of which had been checked. He had detained three foreign coaches because their drivers had had insufficient rest.

The Riviera service in an air-conditioned coach, manned by two drivers and equipped with video movies, a toilet and hot and cold drink service, was comfortable even if the five or six

hours between stops seemed a long time.

Passengers alight at Dover to clear immigration and customs, otherwise it is straight sitting on the coach for most of the 900-mile journey.

From Calais via the Paris périphérique we travelled to Auxerre—two hours south of Paris—for the overnight stop in a new motel with swimming pool.

At 8 a.m. we were back on the road for a 12-hour day, with several stops before the first set-down point at Aix-en-Provence. We reached the coast at Ste Maxime before the last leg to Nice and Cannes. The licence was granted jointly to Epsom Coaches, which operates 50 coaches, and a French company, Cars Phocéens. Passengers will have to switch from English to French coaches during an hour long lunch stop at a Euromotel in Orange.

The service is designed to appeal to people who do not like, or cannot afford to fly.

Tickets from any travel agent or Riviera Express, Park Lane, Croydon. There is a high season supplement of £5 one way, £10 return for travel in July and August.

Carol Thatcher

COACHING JOURNAL JULY 1983 New service to French Riviera

A NEW express coach link between the UK and the South of France was launched on July 1 by Epsom Coaches. The service, the Riviera Express, leaves London's Victoria Coach Station every Friday morning and arrives in Nice the following evening, and there are connecting services with many parts of England, Scotland and Wales.

Fares are £60 single and £108 return during July and August and £55 and £98 respectively during the rest of the year, inclusive of overnight accommodation and Continental breakfast, making it the cheapest licensed direct link between London and the South of France. The Apex air return fare is £178 and the conventional rail return costs £131.50.

Riviera Express is the first direct coach service on the route to be licensed by the French Ministry of Transport and the Department of Transport in the UK and complies with the highest standards of equipment, safety and accommodation. The joint operators are Epsom Coaches and Cars Phocéens of Nice, both of whom have been established for more than 40 years. The connecting services throughout the UK are being provided by National Express and the Scottish Bus Group. Bookings for the service can be made through National Express, Supabus, most travel agents, or Riviera Express, 8 Park Lane, Croydon (Tel: 01-680 8787).



SIX new luxury vehicles have joined the fleet operated by Epsom Coaches.

Costing around £75,000 each, the distinctive high bodied coaches are built by Plaxtons on Volvo chassis.

Special features include air suspension, reclining seats and double glazing.

Four of the newcomers are 50 seaters and the rest 40 seaters.

The 40 seaters are primarily for use on extended tours, private hire work and the weekly run to the South of France.

They come complete with toilet and washroom facilities, equipment for tea

and coffee making, video and air conditioning.

Epsom Coaches, Surrey's largest independent coach operations, now have a fleet of nearly 50 vehicles.

Pictured applying the finishing touches to one of the newest coaches is paint shop supervisor Mick Sayers.

Clowning around

GUARDIAN 19/4/84



Bonnet full of trips

ANDY the Clown a packed schedule of fun runs offered Easter by Epsom Coaches. The clown, Tony Drewitt of Hazon Way, will lead a St George's Day mystery tour to a Buckinghamshire town housing top film and television musical stars. Between Good Friday and Easter

Monday the coach operators are running nearly 20 excursions ranging from the Cotswolds to the coast and from Penshurst Place to the Isle of Wight.

Fares are from £3 a head with reductions for children and more details from Epsom 27821.



CLOWNING around in the Easter spirit is Tony Drewitt, of Hazon Way, Epsom. Tony, alias Candy the clown, led a mystery Easter tour to Buckinghamshire on behalf of Epsom coaches.

Express coach to S France

A NEW express coach link between the UK and the South of France is to start operations on July 1.

The Riviera Express will depart from London's Victoria coach station each Friday morning and will arrive in Nice the following evening.

Fares will be £60 single, £108 return, during high season July/August, and £55 and £98 respectively during the remainder of the year.

Epsom Coaches and Cars Phoceens of Nice are operating the service and they claim it is the cheapest licensed direct link between London and the South of France.

Riviera Express also says it is the first direct coach service to be licensed by the French Ministry of Transport and the UK's Department of Transport.

Operate

Epsom Coaches will operate the section between London and Orange, using 44-seater coaches with reclining seats, air suspension and air-conditioning and toilet.

Connecting services throughout the UK are provided by the Scottish Bus Group and National Express.

The route is via Croydon, Dover and Calais direct to Orange and then via Aix-en-Provence, St Maxime and Cannes with overnight accommodation in good class hotels with private facilities.

Riviera Express is based at Park Lane, Croydon. Tel: 1-680 8787.



Nice one, Hugo!

Celebrating French Leave's first-ever direct coach service from London to Nice are (left to right): Ron Cavanagh, French Leave; Roy Richmond, managing director Epsom coaches; Ann Ketterer, director French Leave; Francis Flynn, divisional director Riviera Express; Alan Ashman, marketing assistant Sealink Dover; Hugo Amaya-Torres, managing director French Leave; and, pouring the bubbly, Captain Edwin Venables, senior master of Sealink's Dover-Calais ship, the St Christopher.

COACH SERVICE TO LINK NICE WITH LONDON

By Our Transport Correspondent

The Riviera Express is to be launched as an express coach service linking London with Nice from July 1. It will be provided jointly by Epsom Coaches and Cars Phoceens.

High-season fares will be £60 single, £108 return for July and August, dropping to £55 single and £98 return for the rest of the year, including overnight accommodation and a Continental breakfast.

The service will depart from London every Friday night and arrive in Cannes the following morning going via Dover, Calais, Orange and Aix-en-Provence.

In brief

EPSOM Coaches is taking delivery of two specially built £90,000 touring coaches in March. Built to Epsom's specifications, the 44-seater British built Volvo coaches will have air-conditioning, toilets, TV and video and increased luggage space. The operator aims to offer them for private hire to tour operators.

TTG
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AVIS has brought its toll-free

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Riding round the show in the mini-coach.

[Photos: 842684 Samantha Finn (9) and Minstrel.

Pictures: RICHARD WARD Story: MARK WILLIAMS

SHIRT-SLEEVED holiday crowds flocked to Court Recreation Ground to enjoy the Borough Show at the weekend.

Thousands of people spent the afternoon looking round the many different stalls and shows at the ground.

And there was something

there for everyone to enjoy.

In the muggy almost suffocating heat of Sunday, the most popular place at the showground seemed to be the beer tent, doing brisk business all afternoon.

But once the thirst had been satisfied, it was time

to wander round the showground to look and learn and enjoy.

There was an impressive display of veteran and classic cars, ranging from Fords, Austins and Standards to the more modern cars from the 1950s and 1960s, evoking memories of "That'll Be The Day."

For the kids, who might not have appreciated a wander round the showground, there was Palfi the Clown to entertain them.

Or they might have preferred to spend some time jumping up and down for all they were worth on a giant inflated green dragon.

And if they didn't feel like walking anywhere, there was a mini-sized Epsom Coaches coach taking people for rides around the show.

Among the stalls were some fascinating ones. There was one entirely devoted to antique farm tools, which featured such relics from the past as a shepherd's crook, old milk churns and ancient looking sheep shearers, plus some

old egg boxes — made out of wood, then, unlike today's cardboard efforts.

There was also a bee-keeping demonstration by members of the Epsom branch of the Surrey Bee-Keeping Association.

Although the watching crowd was protected from the bees by netting, it was still unnerving to stand just inches away from 50,000 of the insects.

Honey and beeswax and other bee-products were on sale, and going fast.

During the afternoon an exemption dog show was going on and on Monday the whole day was given over to an open dog show.

The borough's parks and recreations department put on a show of Outdoor Leisure, featuring the borough's parks and open spaces, plus a gardening display.

And in the marquee — fortunately not needed as there was no rain — was a continuous hubbub of noise as people searched among the goods on sale for a few bargains to take home.

After battling through the marquee, which had all the appearance of an Arabic street market, you came nicely back to the beer tent for a quick pint before going home.