

HRR NEWS

ISSUE NO. 1

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1963

EPSOM COACHES CATCH THE PUBLIC EYE

Recent events have catapulted Epsom Coaches into the limelight as never before. Press, radio and television have all played their part in helping to put the company, and in particular our commuter services, very firmly into the public eye.

The media's interest was sparked off by the new Epsom Coaches commuter service to the West End and Victoria beginning in February, the announcement of which happened to coincide with the publication of the Serpell Report on British Rail. One of the recommendations in that report was that fares on BR's commuter services should increase by 40 per cent.

This prompted 'The Times' to publish an article under the headline "The Age of the Coach is Coming" in which Epsom Coaches, "Surrey's biggest coach commuter firm" were singled out as the example of how a coach company were providing an attractive alternative to British Rail.

The point was promptly picked up by the BBC, who broadcast an interview with Chris Richmond on the 'PM' programme on Radio 4. It was not long before BBC TV News were on the phone: Could they come out early on Monday morning and film commuters on one of the services? We were only too pleased to oblige, and on the morning of 10 January, Roy Richmond and several passengers on the Great Bookham service were interviewed en route between Epsom and the A3. The resulting item, which included some complimentary comments about the service and some good shots of the coach, duly appeared on the main news at lunchtime the same day.

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At about the same time articles about the new service appeared in the 'Daily Telegraph', the 'Standard' and in almost every local Surrey newspaper. Amidst it all, one jarring note was sounded. That was in the 'Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser' who in their report remarked that we had 'cashed in on last year's rail dispute when commuters had to find alternatives to British Rail'.

Concerned to put the record straight, Roy Richmond sent a letter to the Editor which was published during the week ending January 21 pointing out the comment was less than fair. He explained that the normal, low commuter fares were based on there being day excursion work for the coaches once they reached London; that during the winter rail strike, as there was no London work for the extra coaches put on for the commuters benefit, the service lost money; and that during the summer rail strike when many of our coaches were away on tours we were unable to put on enough to meet the demand. Overall, the service just about broke even, he explained.

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In the meantime another television request was received, this time from London Weekend Television to include Epsom Coaches in a feature for 'The London Programme', screened at the beginning of this month.

Some of the other activities have also received their share of publicity, notably the 1983 programme of holiday tours in the local press and the new Grand Touring coaches in one of the leading travel trade publications.

Being in the public eye, as we all know, has its responsibilities; the more the publicity the greater the need to be aware of our role, particularly that of serving the public to the best of our ability.

THE TRAVEL AGENCIES

Both our travel agencies report that bookings have picked up encouragingly after a disappointing start in early January. Both have seen an upsurge in activity since some of the major tour operators reduced the price on selected holidays by up to £20 and introduced no-surcharge guarantees.

Our manager at Crescent Travel in Leatherhead, Len Spencer, says the publicity caused by these special offers has been such that in some cases - Interlaken for one - they are having difficulty in getting through on the phone to the operators concerned, so great is the demand for bookings.

At Epsom Travel, Manager Colin Wyeth, forecasts that Greece will be high in the popularity polls this year and that Spain will be as much in demand as ever. And, he adds: "Hooray for coach tours! Bookings have got away to a very good start for almost all the operators, Epsom Coaches included."

EXPANSION PROPOSED AT ET

Negotiations are in hand to acquire a small but rather useful parcel of land by the side of Epsom Travel, which would enable that office to deal with their business more easily.

ET HAZARD WARNING

All drivers beware! Colin Geddes of Epsom Travel has started taking driving lessons....

FOUR NEW COACHES

We have four new coaches on order for delivery in February/March. We have had so many lost days due to breakdowns on the Leyland Tigers (over 150 days last year) that we decided to change to the Volvo B10M chassis for the immediate future.

We spoke to many operators of Volvo coaches before making the decision to change, and are confident that Volvo will provide greater performance, reliability and service support at home and abroad. The Volvo B10M has full air suspension, 262 bhp turbo-charged engine and two of the new coaches will also have the two-speed splitter box fitted.

As Plaxtons have updated their coachwork for 1983 we decided to stay with them and all our orders will be for the new Paramount 3500 high body which will accommodate almost double our present luggage capacity. These coaches will cause some garaging problems because of their height and certain bays on the car park side of the garage will be reserved for them.

Two of the new coaches will be 55-seaters and the other two will be 44-seaters. The specification for the latter includes video, WC/washroom, driver's compartment, reclining seats, full carpeting, refrigerator, air conditioning, double glazing and coffee making facilities. It is hoped that one of these coaches will be used on a twice weekly contract to the South of France, but this is subject to confirmation.

VOLVO B10M TRAINING COURSE

At the end of November, Barry Harding and Brian Mutter attended the Volvo B10M training course in Scotland. This was in readiness for the new Volvo coaches which we expect will be in service in March.

The course not only provided a good background to servicing and repairing Volvo coaches but also gave an opportunity to discuss maintenance problems with other mechanics. Barry and Brian travelled to Glasgow on the Cotters Coaches express service which uses Volvo coaches exclusively.

This is the first issue of the Company's own newsletter, which aims to keep all of us informed about what is going on within the various parts of the organisation. It is intended as an in-house publication, strictly for the benefit of our staff and their families - not, please, for our competitors!

The plan is to publish the newsletter every two months, though the frequency will be governed to some extent by the flow of news. In a way, that depends on you.

Communications is a two-way business. As with the two-way radios in our coaches, we hope that as well as receiving information, you will contribute, too, by submitting items for publication. As you will see from this issue, they don't have to be too serious - as long as they're in some way connected with the business. And any ideas you have for additions and improvements will be welcome. (Please note that contributions for our next issue should be handed into the general office, marked for the attention of The Editor, no later than 15 March)

We are grateful to the enthusiasm with which some of you responded to our request for a title, notably Ray and June Locke and Ron Chandler and his wife. Some of the suggestions gave us a good deal of amusement and one or twomade us blush, but the one we chose to use was that contributed by Peter Stephens and which, quite simply, says it all. In Peter we have also discovered a rare talent as an artist (it's his work on what's known as the 'masthead' at the top of the page) and as a cartoonist (see back page). We're confident there is a wealth of other talent in-house which will come to the fore as we travel on. So, if your seat belts are fastened,

The coach operation is passing through a difficult phase. At long last the industry has come to the moment of truth and contraction has been forced upon it by years of under-pricing. With impending company failures and voluntary liquidations, the 1983 season may well prove to be a challenge hard to meet for those with reduced fleets.

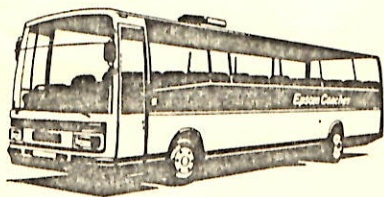
I believe that we are starting the year in good shape with a first class fleet, first class people and some first class business opportunities. I do not for one moment imagine it will be an easy year, but with goodwill and hard work - commodities we have never found lacking in our organisation - I have no doubt that we shall succeed.

This is not the place for dealing with specific subjects, since they are covered elsewhere in this newsletter, but I should just like to mention our application to run a service to the South of France. This should be resolved one way or the other in the near future. If the application succeeds it will be unique in that it will be available to individuals and not limited to groups.

A final word about the newsletter. It is designed to fulfil a long-felt wish by many of us. In order to carry it through and to deal with other aspects of our business we have decided to retain the services of a public relations company based in Ashted headed by Peter Firth, who has some knowledge of the bus and coach industry and many years experience of dealing with the media. I hope we shall all give him our full support.

Ray Richmond

Welcome aboard!



HOLIDAY TOURS

Amidst the gloom and despondency shrouding most sectors of the holiday industry at the start of the 1983 season it is gratifying to be able to report that bookings for the 1983 Epsom Coaches holiday tours programme are almost on a par with last year's figure.

Many operators began the year with announcements that bookings were 30 per cent down on those of 1982, and it was not long before we saw evidence of their anxiety in the shape of price cutting. We, too, began to have qualms when our first significant week of booking activity showed a 12 per cent drop over the comparable period last year. A week later, however, the drop was down to 8 per cent and one week later still to only 3 per cent. Given that it continues to move in this direction we are optimistic that we shall equal if not exceed the 1982 results.

These encouraging results, we believe, are due to two main factors. The first is that there is always a market for quality, however difficult times may be, and it has ever been our aim to provide a quality product. We try, too, to combine quality with variety, and this year there are several innovations. As well as extending our range as far south as the French Dordogne and as far north as Norway, we are including short tours to Springtime in Kent and Autumn in the New Forest, a Grand Tour of Scotland, and a luxury weekend in a 5-star hotel in Sussex. All told this year there will be 120 departures in England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands, France, Holland, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland and Austria.

The second factor is the implementation of a new advertising policy. The main effect of this has been to replace the comparatively small advertisements placed every week in numerous local papers with major full page features in just six - 'Wimbledon & Morden Guardian', 'Sutton Borough Guardian', 'Epsom & Ewell Guardian', 'Kingston Informer', 'Mid-Surrey News' and 'Sutton Herald' - over a period extending from 6 January to 4 February.

As those of you who have seen the features will know, this represents a completely new departure for us in several respects, not least in the introduction of a special competition for holiday prizes (not open to members of staff, of course!) for which well over 200 entries have been received so far, the closing date for entries being 14 February.

If necessary, similar advertisements will be placed in July. Meanwhile, we are proposing to run a series of single-column, single subject advertisements with a simple illustration of the subject in question (day trips to France, stately homes and gardens, and so on). In this way we are hopeful that we shall be able to combine continuity with economy.

The advertising campaign is being supported by our exhibition coach, which has been touring the area rather like a mobile hoarding for the past few weeks headed by Ron Chandler and Alan Lewis and a team of drivers and which has already distributed 8,000 holiday and excursion brochures, as well as by static displays at Sutton Library (Ken le Lacheur) and at the Sutton branch of Alders department store (Martin Wells and Kim Hack).

In addition, a new type of counter display is being prepared for distribution to our local agents, ingeniously designed to show the view through the front window of an Epsom coach.

In the meantime we hope that all our staff, and particularly those who are in regular contact with the general public, should make sure they have ready access to supplies of holiday and excursion brochures (commuter leaflets, too) to pass on to anyone who shows an interest. It goes without saying that it is in the interests of us all to bring our services to the attention of as many people as possible.

Note to Drivers:

Please ensure you have copies of all our current literature, viz., 1) Holiday Tours; 2) Day, Afternoon and Evening Excursions, 3) Commuter Services, 4) Day Trips to France for Groups, and 5) Private Hire.

NEW DAY TOURS BROCHURE

The finishing touches are just being placed on our new day tours brochure for May - December 1983, and will be going to press shortly. The brochure is expected to be ready during the second week of March, in time for our Open Day.

All areas - Epsom, Sutton and Kingston - will be combined in the same brochure for the first time. New tours for 1983 include: Alton Towers, Essex Tour, Ploughman's Lunch and Whitbread Hop Farm, Military Musical Pageant, 'Heart of the Nation' son-et-lumiere, Farm Visit and Barbecue, and a Summer Picnic.

HOLIDAY DISCOUNT SCHEME

All members of the staff of H R Richmond Ltd and their immediate family are entitled to a discount on ABTA holidaytours and air or ferry tickets. The discount is equivalent to half of the commission - usually about 5 per cent off the total price of a package holiday. Also, friends who may be travelling with a member of staff are entitled to quarter of the commission.

SALLY'S SECRET

Our latest secret weapon in the effort to convert holiday and excursion enquiries into bookings is Sally Cox in the Seat Reservations Department. Sally underwent a special Telephone Sales Course just before Christmas in anticipation of the start of the holiday season rush. She is currently reported to be out-bussing Busby.

SALLY'S OTHER SECRET

We hear it's cream cakes all round when Sally celebrates her 'Coming of Age' on March 13!

TURNING THEIR HANDS.....

The off-season months, when times are comparatively quiet, are usually seized upon by members of our staff to demonstrate their versatility. Thus in the best company tradition drivers at Bookham Yard, our depot on the Guildford Road, have spent the past few weeks on re-roofing, chopping down trees, and tidying up in general. Meanwhile, along the road in Church Street, Leatherhead, the staff of Crescent Travel have become so adept at doing their own office cleaning they are thinking of offering their services to clean up the town centre and its notoriously untidy bottle bank.

UNIFORM ALLOWANCE

The uniform allowance for Epsom Coaches drivers for the 1983 season comprises:

- 1 maroon jacket
- 1 tie
- 2 pairs grey trousers
- 3 white shirts

CHILDREN'S OUTING

It's unusual to measure the success of an outing by the number of tears shed - except when the object of the visit is "ET". So we are pleased to report that there was hardly a dry eye in the house during our annual Children's Party visit to the cinema in Croydon last December to see the film which everyone has been crying about.

Foreman Doug Jennings organised the event, which included a visit to the circus at Chessington Zoo for the younger children, followed by hamburgers for all at McDonald's and a demonstration of the art of conjuring by Mick Ford from our Workshops.

PASSENGERS OF THE FUTURE

With an eye to the coming generation of coach user, in January we circularised schools within a 15-mile radius, which includes central London, with a letter and special colour leaflet on day trips to France.

The same 'package' is to be sent shortly to all private hire customers and prospective customers, together with a copy of our new Day Tours brochure.

SPECIAL VISITS

We shall be running two special visits in March for the benefit of party organisers and certain members of our own staff. They are to Leeds Castle on Tuesday, 1 March, and to Thorpe Park on Tuesday, 8 March.

Each party organiser is invited to bring a guest and we shall entertain them to coffee and biscuits, a presentation tour and lunch.

COMPUTERISATION

After over two years of development, the Epsom Coaches computer system has now become the hub of the administration of Seat Reservations and Private Hire. Although there were many problems to be overcome, the system is working well. Further development is taking place and it is hoped to complete the system by the middle of this year. The system has already attracted several enquiries from coach companies wishing to computerise their administration.

COMMUTER SERVICES

The new Epsom Coaches commuter service between Epsom and the West End is due to start on Monday, 7 February. We hope it will prove attractive not only to commuters but also to those people travelling further afield who will appreciate this through link with the Victoria Coach Station.

With the Great Bookham and Dorking commuter services firmly established, application for our third route was applied for last October since all services under 50 km require a licence. When our application was published by the Traffic Commissioners it drew objections from London Transport, London Country and British Rail. Fortunately, we managed to satisfy all the objectors in time for the service to start in February, within a week or two of our intended starting date.

Route No 3 will commence from Tattenham Corner at 07.15 hours, call at Epsom at the same time as Route No 1 (please note!), then Bishopsmead School, the bus lay-bys on the Kingston Road including the existing stop at Wilks Travel, Victoria will be served at two points, the first opposite the former British Airways Terminal and near to the Coach Station in Buckingham Palace Road, then at Lygon Place in Ebury Street just this side of Grosvenor Gardens, before reaching the terminal - Barclays Bankin Hanover Square.

We believe there is enough business in the West End from tour operators to justify a third vehicle earning part of its standing costs. Success, as in almost all aspects of our operations, will be linked very closely with good timekeeping.

Passenger Reaction

Fares on the commuter services are to be increased by 10 per cent on the date the third route comes into operation. Fares on British Rail have already been increased this year by a similar proportion so that price differentials will be maintained and with them, we hope, our share of the traffic.

In advance of the fares increase we took the opportunity in November to undertake a passenger survey on the two established routes. This was partly to keep a check on their operation and partly to give passengers an opportunity to air their views. In the first instance Dave Swift travelled on both services and chatted to passengers. The feedback gave us a basis on which to work out a questionnaire. We are pleased to say we received 80 replies.

Generally, the passengers were very complimentary about the service. It was not just the low cost factor which attracted commuters. Courteous drivers, comfort, convenience and reliability were other important reasons for travelling by coach.

We found that almost nobody wanted refreshments to be served on the coach, nor did anyone require an evening paper, so we have postponed further consideration of these 'optional extras'. However, a clear majority like to listen to the radio news, although some did state a preference for the headlines only.

As a result of the survey, it was decided to operate Route No 2 ten minutes earlier in the mornings to lessen delays due to traffic.

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Our hearts go out to Brenda Arter, a member of the staff of Epsom Travel, whose sense of duty forced her to spend a few days in Miami just before Christmas. Putting a brave face on it, Brenda agreed to fly first class to Florida on a six-day tour operators' visit. Nor did she complain when they offered her a self-drive car to tour the hotels and beaches. A pity our travel agency people never get a chance to mix pleasure with business.....

.....which reminds us, rumour has it that Cadogan Travel are flying Colin Wyeth out to Cyprus to see Aphrodite in all her glory!

ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

John Wort of Crescent Travel is off to Damascus as guest of Swan Hellenic Tours.

OPEN DAY

Epsom Coaches are holding our 'Open Day' on Saturday, 19 March from 1000-1700 hours. We hope to attract about 1,000 people and there will be a courtesy coach service to major towns in the area.

On display will be one of our latest coaches alongside one belonging to our Company in the 1950's. The computerised bookings system and workshops will also be on show. We shall be running a free raffle and providing visitors with tea and biscuits.

In conjunction with Open Day, we shall be staging a Travel Fair with some 20 tourist attractions in attendance. These include the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Leeds Castle, Beaulieu, Birdworld and the London and South East England Tourist Boards. Elan Artcraft will be represented by a glass engraver who will be demonstrating his skills, and the St Mary's Morris Dancers from Ewell will add a little colour to the event.

VOLUNTEERS PLEASE!

We are looking for volunteers to help with the tea-making at the 'Open Day'. Names please to Rosemary by Friday, 4th March so that a rota system can be worked out.

NO SMOKING!

In view of the increase in the number of areas in which smoking is no longer allowed, those smokers among us whose work takes us into such places during the course of duty are asked to comply with the No Smoking restrictions.

Anyone anxious to give up smoking might be interested to know that Epsom is to be the centre of a National Don't Smoke Day on Wednesday, 9 February. The previous evening there will be a public meeting at Epsom District Hospital addressed by medical experts. In addition, a new Clinic to help smokers to stop is to be opened at the hospital on 15 February. For details, telephone Epsom 40756, extension 25.

Peter Tribe has requested a lieu day so he may attend!

TOUR OPERATORS

The necessity to increase our charges this year is likely to lead to the loss of one or two tour operators. However, the following are expected to remain with us - Courier Services, Holland International, Hotelplan, Hyde Park Travel, IETO, Interopa, Maritz and Warwick West. In addition, we understand that Anglo World may operate a series of 18 tours to Wales with us during the season.

OPEN INVITATION TO TOUR OPERATORS

On Wednesday, 9 March we have invited tour operators based in London and the South East to view our operation and to join us for lunch at the Chalk Lane Hotel. Coach transfers between London and Epsom will be laid on for those attending. All our existing customers have been circulated as well as about 60 operators who are not customers of ours at present. We aim to show operators the quality of our operation and to present our new 'Grand Touring' coaches.

ANNUAL DINNER DANCE

Despite fears that the River Mole was about to burst its banks and carry us and the Burford Bridge ballroom with it, our staff Dinner Dance in December was according to all reports a great success. Revived after a lapse of a year - and with all that water about is wasn't difficult - the occasion was marked by good food, good service and a good band, and 140 of us were there to enjoy it.

During the evening our Managing Director, Roy Richmond, made a short speech and a presentation to Ron Meyer who, because of ill health, has been obliged to take early retirement. A raffle in aid of the Children's Party raised £218.00.

FOOLS' PARADISE

We are planning a special tour on All Fools' Day - 1 April. Suggestions for a suitable itinerary would be welcome - however foolish.....

LETTERS

It is always gratifying to be told we have done a good job, particularly when a satisfied customer takes the trouble to do so in writing. The following letter reflects credit not just on the two drivers involved but on the whole organisation, for which we are all entitled to take a bow.

From the Deputy General Manager of the Hotel Russell, Russell Square, London WC1,

P. Gooch, Esq
Traffic Manager
Epsom Coaches
Blenheim Road
Epsom Surrey KT19 9AF

Dear Peter,

I wish to place on record my grateful thanks to you and your two drivers, Steve and Ivan, for the excellent co-operation and service provided to our guests at the Hotel Russell festivities.

As you have probably heard, it was necessary to evacuate the Hotel and transfer the guests to the Waldorf Hotel, but the pleasant manner in which Steve and Ivan conducted themselves and looked after the guests did much to alleviate the distress and inconvenience that was caused.

It goes without saying that this merely confirms my personal impression that Epsom Coaches is the best coach company in the South East of England, and I am delighted to advise that, should the Hotel Russell arrange a programme for Christmas, 1983, or have any other transport requirements in the interim, I will be in contact with you.

Thank you all once again, and I send you my very best wishes for 1983.

Yours sincerely,

A J G Bennett
Deputy General Manager

SPOTLIGHT ON SAFETY

Our Safety Spotlight in this issue is focussed on passenger comfort, with a reminder to take all possible steps to ensure the smoothest possible ride. This means driving with care and anticipation, changing gear at the optimum moment, and avoiding violent or unnecessary braking - having, in short, a 'feel' for the comfort of the passengers.

One passenger on the Epsom Coaches commuter service complained recently that our coaches were so comfortable that instead of being able to read or do some paperwork, he kept dozing off. We'd like more complaints on similar lines, please!



I TOLD YOU THEY'D HAVE TROUBLE WITH
THESE COMPUTERISED BOOKINGS.

NOT SO CRITICAL

Although she is currently seeing London shows at the rate of one a week, or so it seems to her colleagues at Epsom Travel, typist and bookkeeper Margaret Yorke denies rumours that she is to become the Company's theatre critic.