

ABUS - The History

In May 1991 Alan Peters, a former Badgerline Manager obtained an enterprise allowance and started Abus.

The first bus owned was OHR 184R an E.C.W bodied Damlier Fleetline acquired from Thamesdown Transport. This was used on service A49 which operated eight journeys a day from Union Street, Bristol to Keynsham Park Estate.

The service was increased to twelve journeys per day in September 1991 during a period of sustained competition with Badgerline on the Bristol to Keynsham service. A notable event in February 1992 was the employment of Phil Reason as a driver. He is still employed by Abus on the Keynsham service and has operated over fifteen thousand journeys on the service in this time.

The vehicle was kept, as are all Abus vehicles, at Crown Coaches premises in St. Philips, Bristol and many of the vehicles operated on Abus services are actually provided by Crown on a contract hire basis. The first such vehicle, acquired in 1992, was NDR 509J a Park Royal bodied Leyland Atlantean which like OHR operated in a livery of two shades of blue and cream.

In February 1992 the first tendered bus service, Avon County Council supported service 922 to Oldbury Court School, was started. This service was operated until July 1998 during which the number of passengers was doubled.

In April 1992 four extra journeys were introduced on the Keynsham service and later in the year regular duplicates were introduced using Crown Bristol VR's PPH 465/71/2/4R. PPH 471R was painted into the Abus blue livery which it still carries.

During the winter of 1993 plans were made with Mr Warwick Hulme, another ex-Badgerline employee to run an open top tour of Bristol. This was started with a Bristol FLF, 841 SHW, which remains the only Bristol Engined Bus in regular service. This service has run every summer since. For 1999 the service will run from the Saturday before Easter to the end of September. Vehicles used on the service are hired from Dave Hoare's, Chepstow Classic Buses fleet and are painted maroon, cream and grey. Open tops so painted are 841 SHW, AEC Regent V 508 RUO and Atlanteans DBA 228C and LDX 75G.

During 1994 OHR 184R was replaced on the Keynsham service by Bristol VR NFB 113R. This and PPH 472R were painted in a Red and Cream livery intended to be the standard livery. The popularity of the Abus service continued during 1993 and 1994 to the extent that by 1995 it was possible to purchase a new bus for the service. M645 RCP was a Northern Counties bodied DAF DB250 which was believed to be the first double deck bus with a Euro 2 engine. This bus was allocated to Phil Reason who claimed it was insured owner/driver:- Alan Peters the owner, him the driver. This replaced NDR 509J as the main bus on the service. By January 1996 M645 RCP had been painted in a cream and white advertising livery for the Elizabethan Pine store at Keynsham. County cream and white was later adopted as the standard livery. In April 1996 another Bristol VR ELJ 213V was purchased to replace NFB 113R on the Keynsham service. NFB 113R carried on operating the additional journeys now running every weekday.

During June and July 1996 discussions were entered into with Badgerline, the result of which was a combined 347 and 349 Bristol to Keynsham timetable on which Abus operated six daily journeys on 347 and twenty-three on 349 on Monday to Friday. This schedule required four buses so another VR KRU 841W was acquired. All vehicles for the service were fitted with Wayfarer 3 ticket machines and magnetic card validators and most Badgerline tickets were acceptable. The regular buses were M645 RCP in advertising livery and NFB 113R, ELJ 213V and KRU 841W in county cream and

white with route branding. PPH 465/71/2R were also fitted with backplates for the machines to provide spare vehicles.

By July 1997 it was obvious that service 347 was never going to be as successful as hoped so it was withdrawn and replaced by alterations to Badgerline's 178 Bristol-Radstock-Bath service. At the same time the Saturday 349 frequency was increased to every twenty minutes giving Abus its first regular Saturday duty with six 349 journeys.

At the end of the 1997 summer term Bristol City Council withdrew subsidies on all school services. For September the morning journeys on service 922 was withdrawn and replaced by a Durbins service. The service was renumbered 422. At the same time Badgerline was asked to provide an extra bus on service 430 to Ashton Park School. They were not able to do this but suggested that Abus may operate the journey. From September 1997 service 430 commenced from Broadwalk to Ashton Park School. However, far more important was the winning by Abus of Bath and North East Somerset services 992, 993 and 9943 from Hengrove and Stockwood to Broadlands School, Keynsham, and Tuesday Only North Somerset supported service 683 from Blagdon to Wells. This service usually operated by a VR is probably one of the most scenic double deck bus routes in the country. These extra requirements necessitated the purchase of FBV 490/9W E.C.W bodied Leyland Atlanteans and KRU 844W another Bristol VR. All were soon repainted Cream and White with Abus Faresaver - Buses for Schools fleetnames. The service 349 buses having received Abus Faresaver - Providing a better service fleetnames.

At the 1995 Bus and Coach show Hughes Daf who supplied M645 RCP had shown a low floor chassis. By mid 1997 Optare had designed a body for the vehicle and during the summer Alan Peters became the first operator to order a Fully Accessible Low Floor double deck bus. Due to problems agreeing a price for trading in M645 RCP the order was slightly delayed and at the October 1997 show the vehicle finished to the order of West Midlands Travel was on display. However the school services introduced had increased turnover to the extent that the vehicle could be purchased without any trade in and on 3rd February 1998 R222 AJP was collected from Hughes Daf (by now called Arriva Bus and Coach). This was the Third low floor Optare spectra produced. A chance conversation revealed that West Midlands were launching their bus at midday on the following day so after much effort at 0650 on Wednesday 4th February 1998 R222 AJP became the first low floor fully accessible double deck bus to enter service in Great Britain. This vehicle carries Abus Faresaver - Buses for the new millenium fleetnames. Following normal practice this bus was allocated to Phil Reason.

1998 was to become a busy year for Abus. In April 3 Bath and North East Somerset bus service tenders were started. Ser 778 is a Sunday service from Bristol to Writhlington which covers the 349 route. 790/1 was a summer Sunday Bath to Weston-Super-Mare service and 772 was a Tuesday route from Hinton Blewitt to Bath. 772 was operated using minibuses from the Crown Coaches fleet and was terminated in April 1999 being replaced by other Bath and North East Somerset services. The buses for the other routes were more interesting. Alan Peters had always enjoyed driving Bristol R.E. Single deckers and during 1999 the chance came to buy HHW 920L a two door 44 seat. Almost immediately after, OAE 954M a fifty seater, came on the market. This was Alan's favourite bus and was also bought. These were both MOT'd and prepared for service. HHW 920L was used extensively on the 778 during the summer of 1998 also operating on service 349 at times. It was replaced for the winter by DAF R222 AJP and regular use by passengers with wheelchairs means that this route will remain a low floor operation. OAE 954M proved less reliable and saw very little use. The 790/1 services were operated with V.R.'s sometimes even needing duplicates. However the cost per passenger to the council was very high and the route was not operated in 1999. In May Bristol City Football Club were promoted to the first division. An open top tour was operated by Abus using LDX 75G and 508 RUO. This received much local television coverage.

Two events occurred in June. Abus was asked to provide a service to the pensioners festival at Ashton Court. Service A was registered to operate from Temple Meads and the City Centre to Ashton Court. This registration is also used to provide buses to Ashton Gate Football Stadium for Bristol City Matches. Up to 3 double deckers being required on this service. Also in June vehicles were provided for a free service from Castle Cary Station to Pilton for the Glastonbury Music Festival. For 1999 Abus is the co-ordinator, providing the buses for this service. Over twenty buses and coaches are used at busy times on this route.

Crown Coaches Managing Director Simon Munden also runs a bus and coach dealership and vehicles from this operation are often used on Abus services. Bristol V.R SWW 301R is an example, even being painted cream and white, OHR 184R and NDR 509J both being disposed of through this operation although OHR 184R has been taken back in part exchange for a V.R. It is at present still at the premises of its last operator, Westward Travel. In July Simon and Dave Hoare provided vehicles for Fairford International Air Tattoo. In 1998 HHW 920L was provided by Abus for self drive work on the airfield. An even larger operation is planned for 1999.

In August the chance came to buy six Leyland Olympian East Lancs double decks from Cardiff. RBO 506/8Y and A513 VKG became Abus vehicles. LBO 501X, RBO 507Y and A512 VKG.

All have been used by Abus. It was intended that 506/8 and 13 be used on the Keynsham service. RBO 506Y was repainted cream and white with route branding and a rear advert for a Kingswood car dealer arranged through the usual Adbus agency used since 1994.

To pay for the Olympians in September M645 RCP was sold to Wilts and Dorset who have other buses of this type. They have since altered M645 RCP to convertable open top layout.

The other Olympians were not immediately painted as it was the intention to sell them. A512 VKG went to confidence coaches Liecester. It was decided to further upgrade the Keynsham service and once M645 RCP had been sold another Low Floor Optare Spectra was bought. S111 AJP entered service on the first of October. The 349 service being operated by two Low Floor Spectras and Olympian RBO 506Y with one weekday journey using a V.R.

The influx of Olympians allowed the sale of V.R's KRU 844W to Westward Travel, and ELJ 213V and KRU 841W to Castle Point buses Liverpool where they have since unfortunately been destroyed by fire in an arson attack.

During the summer of 1998 Simon Munden had acquired twenty-six Bristol V.R's from Badgerline for an Export contract. Delays in this contract meant that these buses were still in stock in November and permission was sought to use some on Crown Coaches work. It was decided to replace Atlanteans FBV790/9W and so V.R's KOO 791/3V were painted cream and white with Buses for Schools lettering. KOO 791V also carries advertising for On the Spot Signs who provide all Abus Vynal lettering. To increase the number of spare vehicles XHK 222X was also painted cream and white in December. This replaced a Dealer stock V.R GTX 746W, which together with two ex-Badgerline V.R's, was exported to New York Apple Tours after having Offside doors fitted. The two Atlanteans were sold to Byron John of Skewen, South Wales.

In April 1999 another V.R EWS 741W was painted for use at Glastonbury and Fairford although not yet licenced. Two Olympians RBO 507Y and A513 VKG were sold to Swiftlink of Bristol for use on school contracts. Also in April the Bath and North East Somerset contract for service 640 Bishop Sutton to Keynsham on Fridays was taken over from Crown Coaches.

Abus history to 1999 – more to follow.