

## **FINAL RUNNING DAY FOR THE BRISTOL VR DOUBLE DECK BUS**

### **PENZANCE 9 DECEMBER**

Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> December will see the end of closed top operation by First Devon & Cornwall of their once ubiquitous standard Bristol VR double deck bus which first entered service with the then Western National Omnibus Company in 1969. To mark this auspicious occasion it is planned that the final three operational examples will run services from Penzance on Routes 1/1A to Land's End, 2/2B to Helston and 17/17A to St. Ives. The VRs are expected to run all day, starting with the 0920 to Land's End and ending with the 23.57 from Helston to Penzance. Special commemorative tickets will be issued on the vehicles. Enthusiasts will travel to Cornwall from all over the UK to ride on, photograph and talk about the VRs on this final day.

So why all this interest; isn't it just another old bus which should be consigned to the scrap heap and shouldn't we be there instead to welcome the modern low floor, wheel chair accessible, air conditioned buses which will replace them?

At the time the first VRs were introduced, Western National had just become part of the nationalised National Bus Company covering the territory of the former Western & Southern National and Devon General undertakings across Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset. Western National went on to purchase the largest fleet of Bristol VRs in the country with 244 bought new and a further 156 second hand examples acquired second hand over the years by Western National and the other companies spawned from it as a result of privatization in the 1980s – a grand total of 400 covering a time span of almost 38 years. Three generations of school children, commuters, holiday makers and bus pass holders have happy memories of riding on VRs throughout the West Country but particularly in Cornwall with its spectacular scenery and stunning coastline enjoyed so much more easily from the top deck.

First Devon & Cornwall's final VR running day is being supported by the West Country Historic Omnibus & Transport Trust (WHOTT) which will be bringing its own preserved VRs, generously donated to the Trust by FirstGroup, to take part in a cavalcade through Penzance leaving the bus station at 2pm. WHOTT has produced a new publication 'West Country Bristol VRs – a Pictorial Tribute' chronicling the history of these vehicles with 99 full colour pictures, available on the day or from Ledger Farm, Forest Green Road, Fifield, Maidenhead, SL6 2NR for £9 including postage.

**Further details** from: Dr Colin Billington, Chairman of The West Country Historic Omnibus & Transport Trust, Tel: 07990 505373, Email: [chairman@busmuseum.org.uk](mailto:chairman@busmuseum.org.uk).

## **Further information**

### **The Bristol VR**

The Bristol VR was developed by Bristol Commercial Vehicles in cooperation with Eastern Coach Works in the early 1960s to meet the demand for one man operated, front entrance, rear engined double decks to counter the rapidly rising costs of crew operation by eliminating the need for a conductor. The VR was designed to continue the Bristol speciality of low floor, low height, flat floor, double decks established with the revolutionary Lodekka introduced in the early 1950s. The ECW body used many of the design features of the Lodekka, in particular the aluminium body frame and panels giving light weight and durability and the characteristic window and roof dome shapes descended from the earlier Bristol K type.

The VR is a handsome vehicle and many would say just as much a design icon as London's Routemaster. It is also a drivers' bus, particularly the later Series 3 with power steering, good all round vision and smooth gear change easily crafted with its semi-automatic gearbox which, together with its extremely economical Gardner diesel engine, gives excellent pulling power on West Country hills even with a full load.

There are already around 30 West Country VRs which have been snapped up for preservation, many restored to original condition. Several will travel to Penzance for the final day of operation including one of the original 1969 delivery which is still owned by First Devon & Cornwall and maintained and operated by the Western National Preservation Group of First employees in Plymouth.

### **The Trust**

The West Country Historic Omnibus & Transport Trust (WHOTT) is a charitable company (Registered Charity No. 1079795, Company registered in England No. 3780463) established to preserve the history of commercial road transport for the education and enjoyment of future generations. WHOTT's ambitions are to build a permanent display hall with archive and restoration facilities at Westpoint near Exeter and has outline planning permission for this. Friends of the Trust receive newsletters with historic articles and get involved in restoring and running the vehicles and working with a very extensive archive collection. The annual rally takes place in September at Westpoint, the Devon County Showground on the outskirts of Exeter, and has attracted a large entry of buses, coaches, commercial vehicles and all forms of transport. For further details see [www.busmuseum.org.uk](http://www.busmuseum.org.uk), in general, and the 'events' area, in particular. To become involved in WHOTT activities become a Friend of the Trust for a minimum donation of £16 per year and receive our quarterly newsletter, WHOTT's News! which includes historic articles about West Country transport – see our website or send your donation to WHOTT, c/o Ledger Farm, Forest Green Road, Fifield, Maidenhead, Berks, SL6 2NR.