

# THE CLASSIC LONDON BUS SOCIETY

Memorable days out by bus for enthusiasts

## Reading Transport - 30 March 2008

The second Society excursion was certainly eventful - but not for all the right reasons ! Picking up 40 members from outside Victoria Coach Station in RMA58, Ensign's former BEA / BA Airport Routemaster, the plan was to travel to Heathrow for a quick photo opportunity outside Terminal 2, before heading to Reading.

However, having performed faultlessly on the run from Purfleet to Victoria, RMA58 decided to cough and splutter its way along the Cromwell Road. A lack of diesel was suggested as a possible problem, and having stopped for a second time, handily just by a petrol station, driver Bob Stanger managed to coax the bus to the pump, where I quickly found myself £88 lighter in the pocket (although the Nectar Points are sure to come in handy!).

Sadly though, this was not the remedy to our problem, and on reaching the Hogarth Roundabout, just a few short miles from our starting point, Bob coasted into a lay-by outside the Chiswick Brewery, and called it a day for RMA58.

So what to do whilst we waited for a replacement vehicle ? As luck would have it there was a pub around the corner greeted happily by some, others took the opportunity to stand at the side of the road snapping startled drivers in a variety of buses and coaches as they sped by. The rest of us stood and chatted, and waited, and waited.

Eventually a rescue crew came with RM54, and we were on our way again (RMA58 being diagnosed with fuel starvation problems). Sadly because of the time lost we had to abandon our run into Heathrow, but RM54 with it's new engine sped us to Reading, where we were greeted by a very patient James Freeman and his team. And what a sight Great Knolly's St was, with all the buses neatly lined up in groups by route numbers. Each one immaculately presented, glistening in the bright sun that shone from a clear blue sky.



RMA58 at Victoria  
- no hint of things to come !

© Terry Wong Min



Great Knolly's St Depot  
- lined up and spotless

© Terry Wong Min



Great Knolly's St Depot  
- in the pink

© Bob Lear

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After a brief introduction from James, members walked around the yard photographing at will, with some buses being moved at the behest of dedicated photographers, expertly directed by Terry Wong Min.

Then on to the next part of the day, a ride on former Reading Mainline routes on Mike Russell's ex Mainline no.15, otherwise known as RM999. With plenty of photo stops along the way, we journeyed as far as Whitley Wood and Turnham's Farm, returned back into town, and then headed out to Hemdean Road before finally ending back at Great Knolly's St. A ride in full of around an hour and a half, and much enjoyed and appreciated by all.

Finally a quick tour of the inside of Great Knolly's St Depot by James, again presented as spotlessly as his buses, before it was time to journey back into London, speeding past stationery M4 traffic in Prescott's outside bus lane, and this time thankfully without event.

My thanks to all those who came along, and waited so patiently whilst awaiting rescue. In particular though to James Freeman, CEO of Reading Transport for hosting our visit and to Adam Corner and Keith Pauline for assisting him. and looking after our photographer's needs. Thanks to Mike Russell for making RM999 available to us, and last, but not least, my good friend Bob Stanger, for not only driving us to Reading and back, but for suggesting this trip, and making it all happen.

Trevor



Terry and Jimmy  
- expert photographers

© Trevor



Ex Mainline no.15 aka RM999

© Bob Lear



TCLBS members pose in front  
of substitute vehicle, RM54

© Keith Pauline

# Cab View

## with 'Bob the Bus Driver'



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### Bob Stanger tells it as he sees it from up front

I was delighted to be driving the former Airport Routemaster RMA 58 to recreate its earlier life transporting passengers between Heathrow Airport and the West London Air Terminal and Victoria. The added lure was to visit Reading Transport's depot, given that it is my home town bus company. Having seen Reading Mainline in its heyday, the recreation of Route A and B in vehicle No.15 former London Transport RM999, was a personal added bonus.

The day started well and the extra polish I gave to the bonnet RMA 58 prior to departure for Victoria Coach station set me on my way, gathering many admiring glances from newly arrived visitors from home and overseas, as the first of many photo shoots of the day captured the mood of anticipation.

Making our way to the area of the former Gloucester Road Air terminal, now a Sainsbury's store, I was able to park opposite for the necessary photos to remember what used to be.

Photographing the RMA at Heathrow was always going to be a challenge with enhanced security. BAA declined our formal request to park outside Terminal 2, so it was planned to use Jimmy Sheng and Terry Wong Min, posing as snap happy tourists, to capture the essential moments !

Shortly after leaving Gloucester Road, I noticed a lack of pulling power from the Routemaster. With this lack of power I had to stop briefly on the Hammersmith flyover, coaxing her back into life, and into a BP garage to check fuel levels. I was pretty certain it was not a lack of fuel in the tank for it is a requirement of Ensigns that all vehicles are fuelled on entering the depot after a days work, so they are ready for the next day.

Trevor judged accurately the tiniest of headrooms as 58 was nudged into the diesel pumps area. Checked for fuel, I was able only to travel another 500yards before having to call it a day just before the Hogarth Roundabout and outside the Fullers Brewery. I had no desire to get onto the M4 with a sick vehicle.

It was clear that RMA58 was going no further, so with a call to Ensigns, an engineer was despatched along with a replacement vehicle that turned out to be RM54 the last Routemaster in London service on route 159 on 9 December 2005.

The subsequent engineer's report from Ensigns showed that fuel starvation because of a faulty fuel pump caused the problems.

Two hours later we headed west in the newly refurbished and newest addition to Ensign's heritage fleet. RM54 is referred to by some as a Dartmaster, as it has been re-engined with a Cummins power plant similar to those used in the ubiquitous Darts. We made good progress along the M4, RM 54 has a good turn of speed.

To say that the line up of Reading vehicles was impressive was an understatement. A lot of preparation had taken place to display the complete range of vehicles that are operated and thanks must go to James and his colleagues for putting on such an exemplary show.

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## Cab View

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'To say that the line up of Reading vehicles was impressive was an understatement.'

© Bob Stanger

Now it was time for Mike Russell to show his craft moving No 15 effortlessly through the centre of Reading and heading for the Whitley Wood terminus of former Mainline route A. Again knowing glances from the Sunday shoppers. The short skirted girls of Whitley Wood and their track suited boyfriends were moved to comment about this old bus entering their turf.

The full route of Line A was followed, on board was James Freeman and his colleagues along with our two guests for the day Malcolm Crowe editor of the Oxford and Chilterns Bus Page [www.chilterns-oxford-bus-page.co.uk](http://www.chilterns-oxford-bus-page.co.uk) etc and Robert Williams editor of Buszone, [www.buzone.co.uk](http://www.buzone.co.uk)

A number of other photo stops were made to show off a very sweetly sounding Routemaster with an AEC engine, still providing the goods in surroundings never imagined by Colin Curtis father of the Routemaster design team, those many, many years ago.



'A number of other photo stops were made to show off a very sweetly sounding Routemaster with an AEC engine'

© Bob Stanger

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## Cab View

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Back to the depot with a tour of the engineering bays, offices and further opportunities for photos not normally available to others. Whilst this was happening I lined up RM54 alongside RM999 for an official record of the day by Sheng, Wong Min, Crowe and one for my own collection as well.

Back on board RM54 we had a rather more straightforward trip back to Victoria and the Embankment.

For all of us it was an eventful day, the sun shone throughout and judging by the many kind comments I received, overall the trip was enjoyed. I certainly had a great time driving two Routemasters that day, although I was very disappointed with the delay due to the breakdown.

Bob



'I lined up RM54 alongside RM999 for an official record of the day'

© Bob Stanger

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