

The History of the Coach

A presentation by Danny (Chief Mechanic) at Mason's Coaches

We are regular users of Mason's Coaches but perhaps, rather than just jumping on for a pleasant ride, we should have a little thought for the coach, its design and history together with the driver and all the mechanics who keep the fleet moving. The morning's presentation was in two parts:

Colin presented the photographic history then Danny explained some of the mechanics and developments of today's coaches.

Colin showed photos of coaches dating back from the Elizabethan early covered coach (on display in Luton) through the Stagecoach and Post Coach to the Victorian Horse-drawn buses. We saw the 1910 motorised chain driven internal combustion engine, then the First World War double-decker and, of course, the turn of the century Steam Engine Bus. We even saw an Open Top Sports Car Bus! Moving on we came to the double sets of wheels and to 'bendy' buses. Now we have plush comfort!

Danny explained the difference between the bus and the coach. A bus was merely to get people from A to B – a quick and safe people carrier. A coach, however, had headrests, armrests, thicker seating plus other extras. The price of a modern bus is approx. £120,000 whereas a standard coach is approx. £320,000.

Danny discussed the importance of the look, colour and identification designs on coaches. On the number of axles, he explained the use of three axles – front, fixed and Tag to provide more comfort and to spread more weight. He made sure we understood how the floating Tag axle eliminated tyre 'scrubbing'. The Tag axle moves in the opposite direction to the front steering axle. Modern coaches have electronic systems which control the rear Tag axle. The coach can carry more weight (passengers) and be longer. Danny explained the braking systems; electric brakes, the exhaust retarder, drum and disc brakes. The coach, therefore, always has a reserve system in case of brake failure. We were shown a photo of the smart, cockpit style, driver's dashboard where at least half of the systems were for passenger comfort. The engine has a 5 minute 'shut down' after the coach stops thus avoiding undue pollution. He showed the 'H' frame chassis of older coaches (the bodywork built onto 2 longitudinal girders) and compared it to the modern 'drop down' chassis which allows more space for luggage.

Members were then given the opportunity to question Danny about various aspects of the modern coach design.

We will, in future, look with more interest at the coaches we travel in!

Victoria Polland

September 2018