

Unit C11.2, Parkhall Trading Estate, Martell Road, London SE21 8EN.
Tel: 07971 456760. Email: info@forwardmodels.net www.forwardmodels.net

Birmingham 'tin fronts' make an appearance

The new models of Birmingham standards produced by Forward Models made a first appearance at The Transport Museum, Wythall on Sunday 5th August. The models are being manufactured in China and have suffered from many delays, including a last minute change of factory. The venue was chosen because the first production model is based on Guy Arab JOJ 533, kept at the museum.

Members of the project's support group, The Forward Association, were invited to inspect the models and take a look at the 60-year old original. During the afternoon there were speeches and presentations. Birmingham-born Rayner Bourton, actor, bus enthusiast and long time friend of Derek Perry, the founder of Forward Models, was on hand to comper proceedings.

Presentations were made to some of those who have contributed to the project. The Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Councillor John Lines, received one of the first models off the production line. Other supporters from Wythall Transport Museum and Yardley Wood Bus Preservation Group also received special edition models.

Forward Models is grateful for the encouragement, criticism and sponsorship given by many people during the last eighteen months since the project began. Derek Perry said: 'Thank you to all those who have been waiting since last year. Your support has kept us going.'

The models were flown over specially for the event. Shop supplies are on their way by ship. Guests were able to handle the models and compare them with the full size versions. Among the compliments there was gratitude simply for producing the model in the first place.

A few participants...

Derek Perry grew up in Selly Oak and went to school in Kings Heath. He set up Forward Models to fill in a gap in his collection of Birmingham bus models.

Rayner Bourton was the original 'Rocky' in *The Rocky Horror Show* and has appeared on television in shows including BBC TV's *Hitch Hikers Guide To The Galaxy*. He is also a writer, director and producer for the stage, recently in London's West End.

Councillor John Lines is the 103rd Lord Mayor of Birmingham.

Malcolm Keeley is one of the leading members of BaMMoT and the author of several books, the latest describing the bus routes of Birmingham.

Peter Turland is a member of Yardley Wood Bus Preservation Group which owns an unusual Daimler Fleetline single decker from Birmingham, kept at Wythall.

Dick Lolley is responsible for Guy Arab JOJ 533, now restored and preserved, and the inspiration for our first model.

Producing a model bus

Forward Models (Birmingham) Limited was set up in February 2011 to manufacture die-cast models of Birmingham buses. With no experience whatsoever of the modelling business, the founder, Derek Perry, simply wanted to add a few 'New Look' types to his collection.

Despite the dozens of different model buses produced every year by the bigger manufacturers, no-one had produced the fine buses so well-remembered from the 1950s and 60s by thousands of Brummies. The reason was economics. The cost of producing die-cast moulds is so high they have to be used to produce as many different types and in as many different liveries as possible. Birmingham's unique buses, only ever seen in blackberry and primrose, were not thought to be an economic proposition.

Derek Perry decided to prove them wrong. He knew that there were hundreds of enthusiasts who shared his disappointment with such a gap in their collections. He had to learn quickly about prototypes and mass production. It was a difficult time both for banks and for model manufacturers. Ominously, one major model producer went bankrupt and the banks went into recession. The planned launch date in late 2011 passed by. However, Forward Models was able to cling on and now the models are finally on their way from the factory.

Birmingham City Transport

After the war ended in 1945, the city had to replace its worn out public transport system. The tram and trolleybus systems were to close down and over 1700 shiny new buses were needed. Birmingham City Transport looked around to select the best manufacturers who could deliver on time at a decent price, as it had always done. At the same time, it looked for technical improvements to make the buses more efficient and easier to drive.

The city already had high standards of design and finish which bus builders had to adopt. These became incorporated in a now famous body style with its luxurious interior and the Birmingham style concealed radiator. However, these standards were continually evolving and each type of bus had different features and improvements. In some cases, the only 'standard' features were the registration letters 'JOJ' or 'MOF'.

The new buses were a great success. At the time, they were a smart, modern addition to Birmingham's streets as the city was rebuilt. They were a source of civic pride, and even made a profit which contributed to keeping down the rates. Some were to last more than twenty years, until painted in WMPTE colours. By then, the city centre had been transformed and public transport had to adapt to the growth of car ownership. But, throughout the 1950s and 60s, the Birmingham bus would become a local icon.

These models are well remembered, and well loved, by generations of Birmingham-born people. They are real collector's items, and not just for bus enthusiasts.

Derek Perry

August 2012