

## Visit to Epsom coaches / Quality Line Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2009

Highway Engineers design and operate the highway infrastructure, but what about those whose livelihood depends on it? A small but select group of members and guests was treated to a very interesting and educational visit to the Epsom Coaches Group on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> July.

Welcomed by Steve Whiteway, Commercial Director, ably assisted by his PA Clare Dunn, we were given a presentation on the history, development and future proposals for this family run company.

Founded in 1920 by Herbert Roy Richmond, (known as Roddy to the family), HR Richmond Coaches was based at many locations around Epsom town - High Street, West Street and South Street - before settling at their purpose built and current premises in Blenheim Road in 1971.

From its humble beginnings with one charabanc complete with solid tyres (!), the Epsom Coaches Group now comprises coaches, buses, its own Fleetcare and Specialist Service operations together with the successful holiday company, Epsom Travel.

It was not only people which enjoyed HR Richmond Transport. They also conveyed horses (though not with the passengers) but in the 1950s, the horse transport side of the business was sold off (although this still trades under the "Richmond" name) and the passenger transport side of the business was substantially developed.

Following deregulation of bus services in the late 1980s much of the coach fleet was put to work on scheduled services operating around Epsom and further into the London area. As this aspect developed vehicles were replaced gradually by specialist buses designed for such use. Every 'bus service' is tracked through a Satellite system and the Controller can monitor, through a colour coding system, whether a bus is late, or even early! [Pictured right]. As Steve pointed out, Transport authorities place a high emphasis on reliability and penalties for late running or cancellation are heavy.



Using 'in house' training facilities, all staff are subject to ongoing training and the company enjoys almost 100% retention of coach drivers and only a 5% bus driver turnover – most of that due to changes in circumstances and/or relocation, not job dissatisfaction. An enviable situation that demonstrates the value of investing in staff. All coach drivers are members of the IAM and bus drivers are trained to a BTEC level of qualification.



From its beginnings the company now has an impressive operation. On the luxury travel side there are 17 modern coaches and two minibuses, 40 full part time drivers with an annual turnover of £2.9M. Quality Line, the bus operations has 61 buses and 155 full part time drivers, creating an annual turnover of £9.5M. A total of seven million people travel with them each year. Through Fleetcare all vehicles are maintained to the highest standards of mechanical fitness and cleanliness and are fitted with CCTV which not only records all events on the outside of the vehicle (which reduces insurance claims considerably) but also gives passengers a drivers eye view (no more racing for the front seat.)

Delegates were presented with an information pack and a much higher opinion of the industry which, requires a skilled and dedicated workforce who are responsible for very expensive machines and the safety and comfort of a high number of people, whether on or alongside the vehicle

We are grateful to Steve Whiteway for hosting this interesting tour. Members wishing to gain more information should access [www.epsomholidays.com/](http://www.epsomholidays.com/)

As a footnote and to show that humour is not lost, the company decided that in the affluent county of Surrey, the message 'Out of service' was inappropriate and some vehicles operating locally have the more refined legend. [Pictured right]

