1914 B-type bus converted into a First World War



Battle Bus transformation project completed

The transformation of B-type bus No. B2737 involved the removal of advertisements and signage after which the windows were boarded up and the body painted into a khaki wartime livery.

The transformation was completed on 12 September and saw the bus fitted with military headlamps and equipped with a pickaxe and shovel. Military markings and War Department number were also applied.

The public were able to see the transformation in progress at London Transport Museum and also had the opportunity to see the completed ‘Battle Bus’ in Covent Garden Piazza on Friday 12 September and at the Museum’s Depot at Acton on 13 and 14 September before it starts a ten day commemorative tour of battlefields across Northern France and Belgium on 18 September.

The restoration and conversion have been made possible as part of a £750,000 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant, which will also cover other activities including an apprenticeship and community outreach programme. The project has also been supported by London Transport Museum Friends and public donations.

London buses played a vital role in supporting Britain and her allies during the First World War. More than a thousand buses were commandeered by the War Department for service on the front lines.

Many of these were driven in France and Belgium, by the same men who had driven them through London's streets. This was the first use of motorised transport in a war and the converted 'battle buses' would travel in convoys at night, often of over 70 vehicles, to transport troops to the front lines. They would take fresh troops out and return with the sick and wounded, or men leaving the trenches for rest periods.

Tim Shields, Project Manager of the B-type bus restoration project, said: "The conversion of the B-type 'Battle Bus' and its visit to the Western Front is to commemorate the contribution and sacrifices made by so many transport workers during the First World War."

Blondel Cluff, Chair of the London Committee of the Heritage Lottery Fund, said: "This legendary vehicle quite literally links the Home Front with the Western Front. It is now about to embark on a journey through time from London to Flanders fields as a superbly restored testament to the courage of London bus crews – civilians pressed into service along with their vehicles – who gave unstinting support to the war effort a century ago."

Goodbye Piccadilly – from Home Front to Western Front exhibition
London Transport Museum until March 2015
The museum is also commemorating the First World War with an exhibition called Goodbye Piccadilly – from Home Front to Western Front, which runs until March 2015. It explores the contribution of London's motor buses and their drivers and mechanics in the First World War and the lives of people living and working on the home front in London. The exhibition presents London Transport Museum's unique perspective on the First World War, exploring how the conflict accelerated social change, how it impacted on the lives of Londoners, particularly women, and the essential role played by bus service staff and buses to the war effort, both at home and abroad.

Notes to editors

About B-type bus B2737

- B2737 has been recently restored with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, London Transport Museum Friends and public donations.
- One of only four surviving B-type London buses, it was built at the AEC Works in Walthamstow in 1914 and before the war served on route 9 out of Mortlake garage in south west London, which operated between Barnes and Liverpool Street. Single ordinary tickets cost 3½d.
- It was one of over 1,000 London buses requisitioned for service on the Front Line during the First World War. These buses were used to transport troops to the front lines - taking fresh troops out and returning with the sick and wounded, or men leaving the trenches for rest periods. They were also used as ambulances, lorries and even as mobile pigeon lofts.

The restoration of B-type No. 2737

- The B-type bus No. B2737 cost around £250,000 to restore and was made possible with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) with additional funding being provided by the London Transport Museum Friends and public donations.
- The restoration is part of a five year First World War commemorative project which includes an apprenticeship programme and collections support, as well as a programme of learning and participation which will ensure that communities across London will have the chance to see and learn about B2737, B-type buses and their role in the First World War through community exhibitions and a touring programme.

About B-type bus B43 – 'Ole Bill'

- On loan from the Imperial War Museum, and standing alongside the 'Battle Bus' is 'Ole Bill' bus No.B43.
- B43, later named after Bruce Bairnsfather's famous wartime cartoon character 'Ole Bill', was built in 1911. The vehicle worked mainly on routes 8 (Willesden to Old Ford) and 25 (Victoria to Seven Kings) before the First World War.
- After the war, on 14 February 1920, it was inspected at Buckingham Palace by HM King George V, thus becoming the first bus His Majesty had ever boarded.
- It worked the streets of London until 1924 when it was handed over to the Auxiliary Omnibus Companies Association, becoming a permanent memorial to the role played by London buses in the First World War and regularly appearing in Armistice Day parades until the1960s.

About Year of the Bus 2014

- The 'Year of the Bus 2014' celebrates the role that London buses, bus drivers and the staff who support them play in keeping the capital moving, and mark a number of important anniversaries, including the 60th anniversary of the Routemaster bus, 75 years since the launch of its predecessor the RT-type bus and 100 years since buses played a vital role in the First World War.
- Year of the Bus is supported by and delivered in partnership with Exterion Media, Abellio, Arriva London, Clear Channel UK, Go-Ahead London, Metroline, RATP Dev UK, Stagecoach, Wrightbus, Optare and telent Technology Services.
- For details of these events visit Transport for London's Year of the Bus webpage.

About London Transport Museum

- London Transport Museum is situated in the heart of Covent Garden and filled with stunning exhibits; the Museum explores the powerful link between transport and the growth of modern London, culture and society since 1800. Historic vehicles, world-famous posters and the very best objects from the museum's extraordinary collection are brought together to tell the story of London's development and the part transport played in defining the unique identity of the city.
- The museum is an educational and heritage preservation charity. Its purpose is to conserve and explain the history of London's transport, to offer people an understanding of the capital's past development and to engage them in the debate about its future. The museum's charity number is 1123122.

Further information

For further information, interview requests and images contact Wendy Neville - Head of Communications at London Transport Museum on 020 7565 7266 and wendy.neville@ltmuseum.co.uk or Siobhan Ion, Marketing and PR Executive at London Transport Museum on 020 7565 7448, email siobhan.ion@ltmuseum.co.uk

For additional background information about B-type buses and B-type bus No. B2737 visit London Transport Museum's blog.