

1909 CommerCar Shooting Brake, or Estate Bus.

known to us as the “Commer”



1909 CommerCar Estate Bus - “The Commer”

There's not too much early history on this vehicle, but it was first owned by Lord Lonsdale, to work on the Lowther estate, near Penrith, Cumbria. Supposed to be a bit of a sportsman – horse racing, boxing, shooting and hunting. It is believed he was the instigator of the boxing “Lonsdale Belt”, and a founder member of the AA. Also known as the “Yellow Earl”, painting his horse drawn carriages, and early motor vehicles yellow, including his Top Hat 20hp Rolls Royce.

FRANK THOMPSON SMITH of 84 Castle Drive, Penrith, says:-

I am 82 years of age and have been connected with the motor industry all my working life. Originally I drove a steam wagon in the Penrith area.

I remember Lord Lonsdale getting a Commer shooting brake, in fact he had two, one a 16 seater and the other a 24 seater, the latter had 5 forward gears.

These vehicles were known in the Penrith area as "yellow perils".

The driver of the smaller vehicle was a Mr. Joseph Youdale of Penrith who was employed by Kieser's Garage.

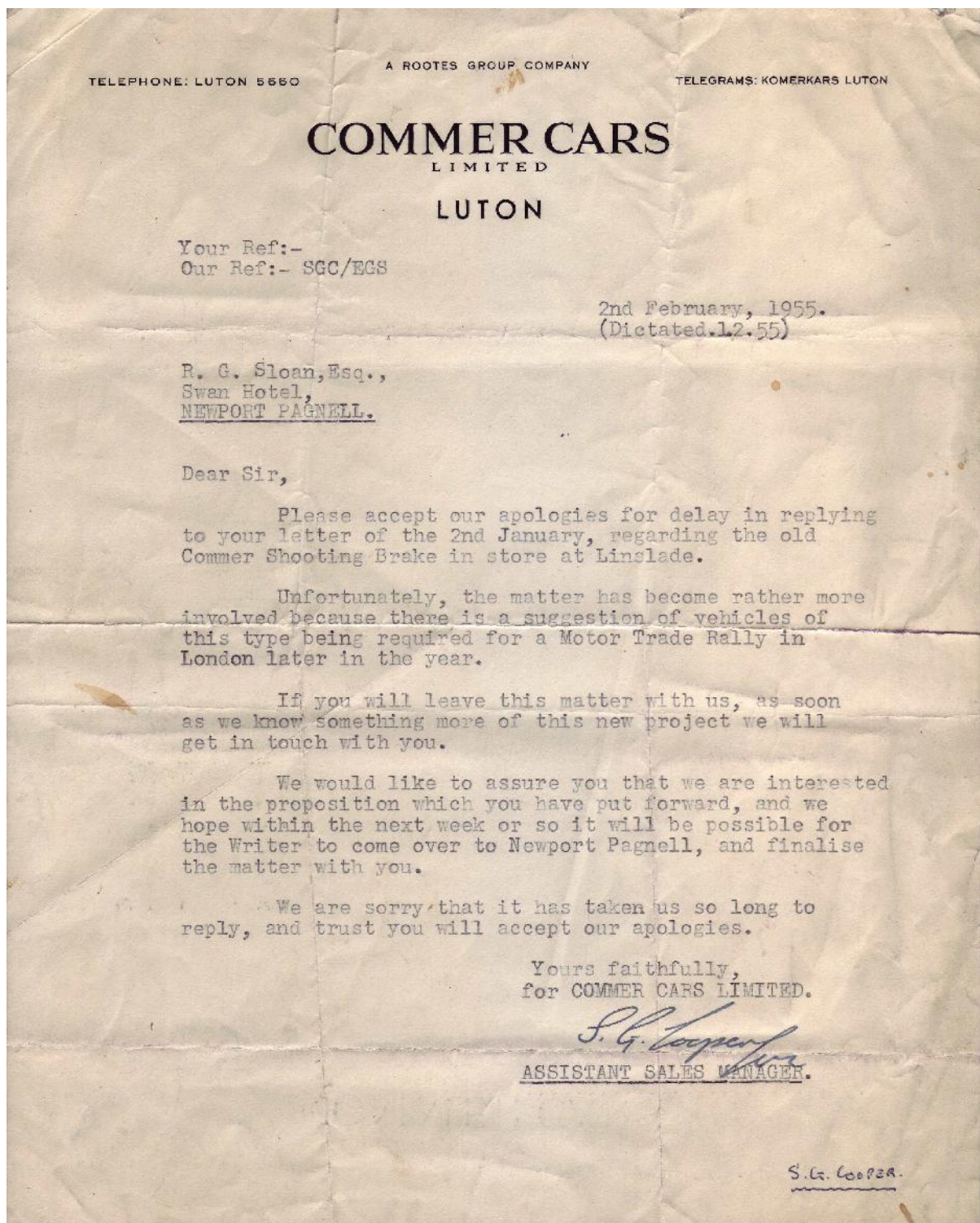
In about 1908 or 1909 Joseph Youdale allowed me to drive the Commer shooting brake and I did so on one or two occasions on the private road in Lowther Park.

I got my first driving licence in 1906.

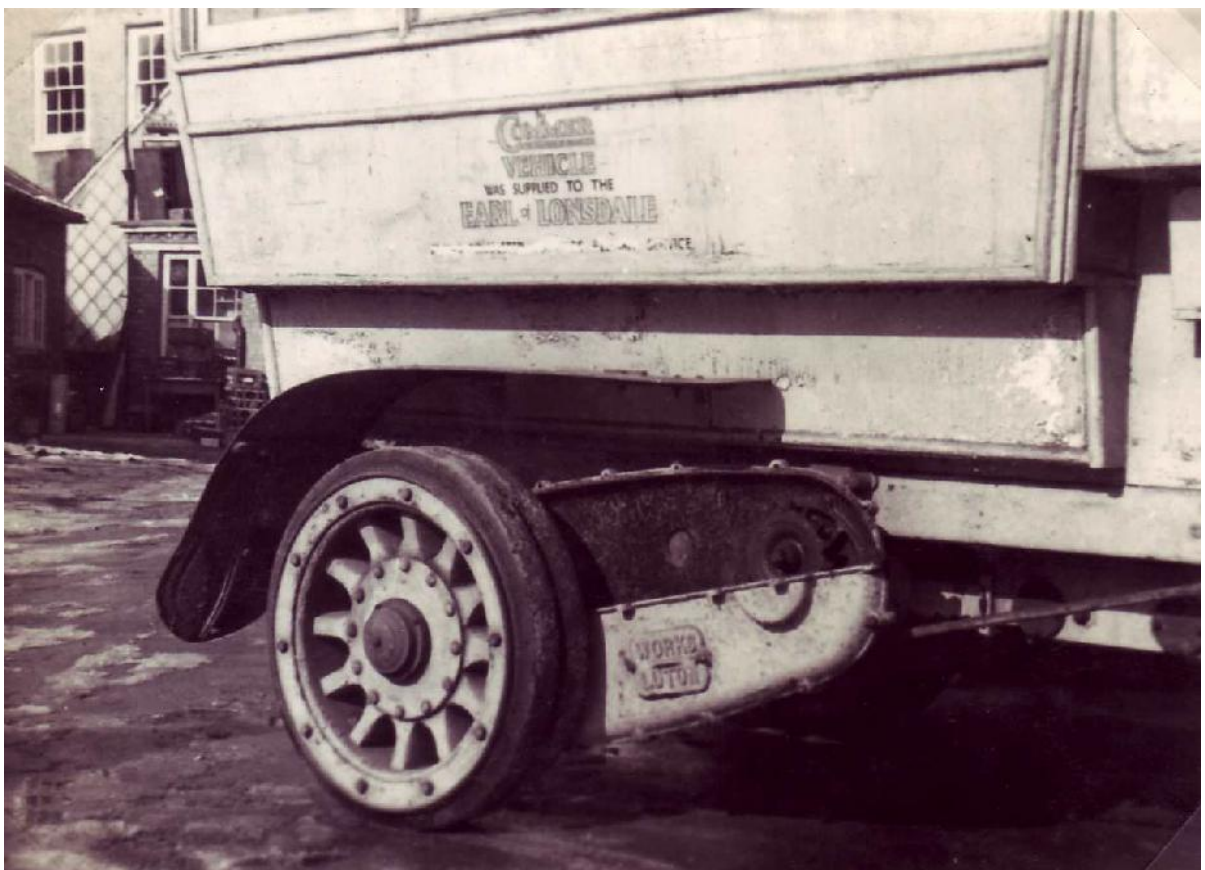
As can be seen from the above note, these vehicles were known as the "Yellow Perils"

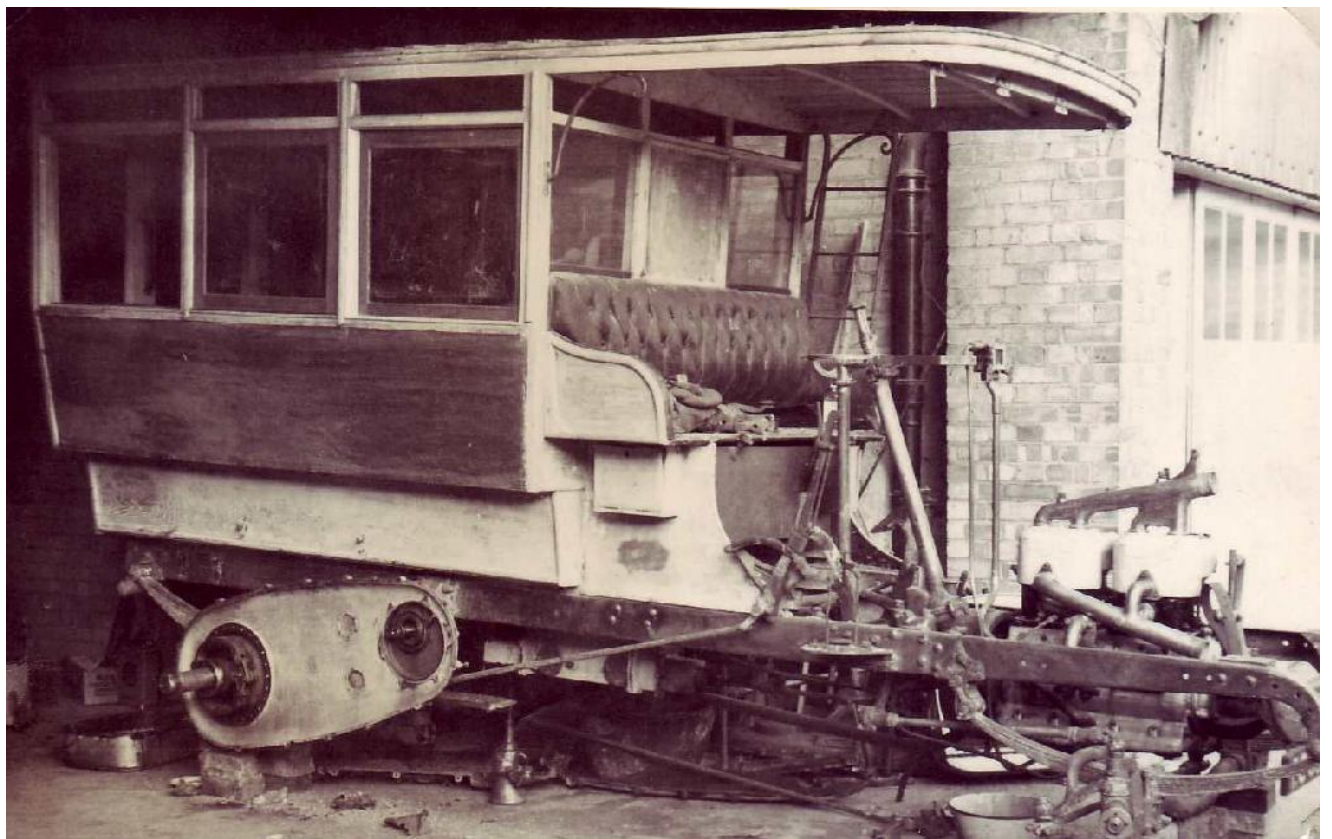
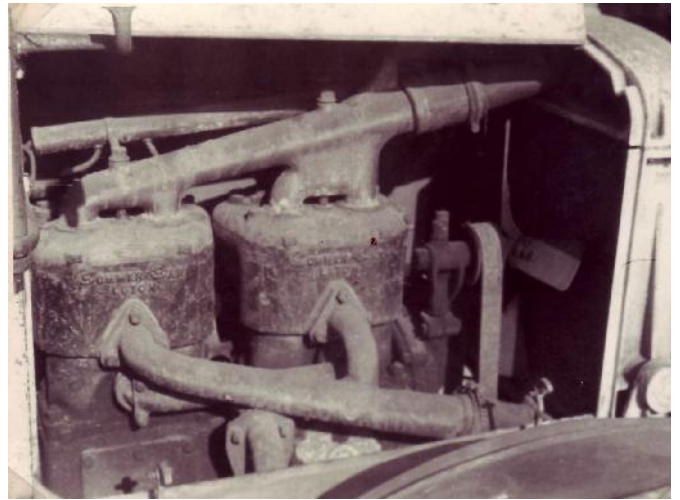
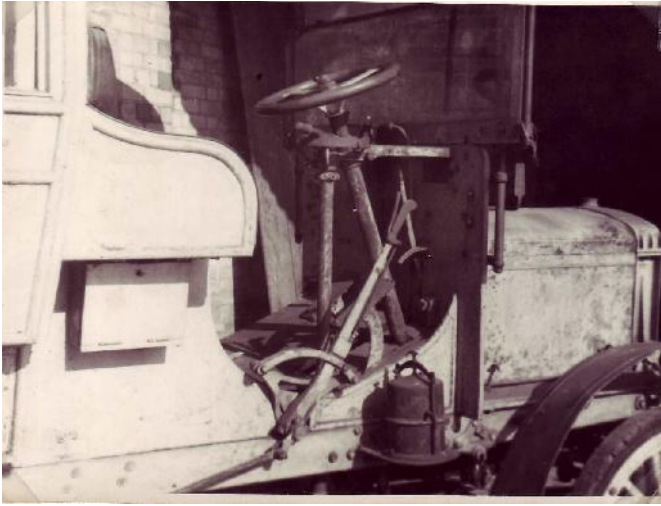
Lord Lonsdale lost his fortune between the two World Wars, and EC 634 ended up back with the factory, along with its bigger sister, a 1913 charabanc.

As can be seen from the Commer Cars letter, my father discovered the bus, January 1955, in a canal barn at Linslade, near Dunstable, along with the charabanc.



As found, in not too good a state.





The work started 1955, and was completed by November 1958, when it accompanied the 1902 Benz in the car London to Brighton as the tender vehicle.

As can be seen from the following certificate, the Veteran Car Club confirmed the date as 1909, on 30th March 1956.

THE VETERAN CAR CLUB of GREAT BRITAIN

Certificate of Dating No. 550

This is to Certify that the vehicle described hereunder, having been examined by the Dating Committee, was, in their opinion, manufactured during the year:

1909

Make of Vehicle Commer Omnibus

Registration Number EC 634
(Motor Car Act 1903)

Type of Body Private bus

Car or Chassis No. 114

Model or Type MC "Braintree"

Make of Engine ~

Engine Number 112409

Makers' Horsepower 22

Number of Cylinders 4

Cylinder Bore 95 mm

Piston Stroke 120 mm

Major Modifications _____

D.B. Fidd

Chairman
Dating Committee

H. Nagle

Secretary

London 30th Mar 1956

Running a hotel in Newport Pagnell, where some of the bosses of the construction firms, building the M1 stayed, my father was allowed to use the M1 before its opening. These pictures show this, but note, Dad on his 1902 Benz is on the wrong side of the road. The boys sitting on the roof of the Commer are myself, and elder brother.



VETERAN TAKES THE MOTORWAY

THE builders of the 1902, 16 horse power, Benz motor car, owned by Mr. Geoffrey Sloan of the Swan Revived Hotel,

Newport Pagnell, could surely never have dreamed that it would ever be driven on the finest road in Europe nearly 60 years later.

If they did, their dream would have come true, because yesterday Mr. Sloan gave his yellow and black, two-seater, Brighton-run car a trip on the motorway — just for the Chronicle and Echo.

On Saturday Mr. Sloan will drive his car, accompanied by a 1906 Commer estate car, to London from where he will start in the veteran car run to Brighton on Sunday.

The estate car which belonged to the late Lord Lonsdale — "the sporting Earl" — will accompany the Benz on the run to Brighton, officially as the "tender-car."

It will carry 12 of Mr. Sloan's friends, all ardent supporters of this annual rally of veteran cars.

A medal

Five times before Mr. Sloan has taken part in the London-Brighton run with his Benz and each time he has collected a finisher's medal.

He hopes to do the same this year and perhaps beat his best time so far, when his was the second car to reach the finish on Brighton front.

What about the weather conditions? Does Mr. Sloan prefer a pleasant day?

"I don't think I do," he said yesterday. "when one has to put up with a bit of wind and rain it adds something to the event, and gives one more satisfaction at the end. Of course my wife would prefer blue sky and sunshine."

Pure luck

Where does a veteran car enthusiast acquire such a car as this fine old Benz?

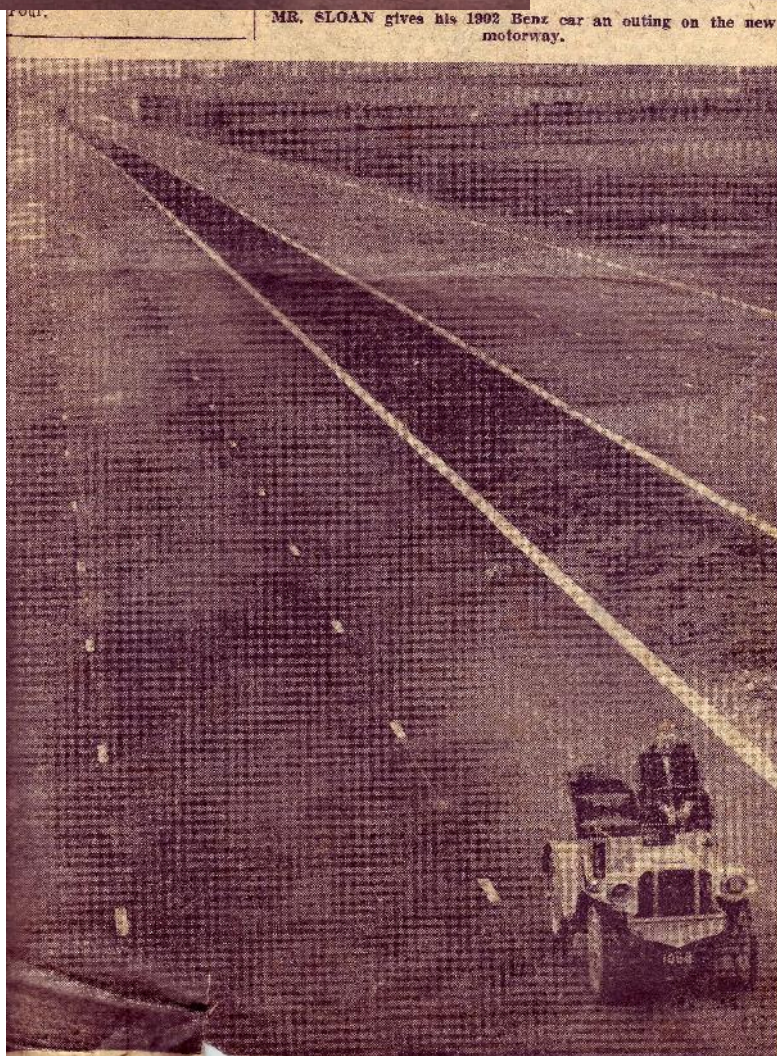
"It is pure luck," said Mr. Sloan. "This one was found under a coal heap in Co. Kildare, Eire, and I got it for £75. Of course, it has cost quite a bit of cash and time to rebuild it."

"When I brought it over here in 1952 I had to pay purchase tax on it! They wanted almost as much as I gave for the car but eventually they accepted about £12 or £14."

The Benz looks in fine trim and ready for many more Brighton runs.

"She always does look good, but usually something goes wrong on the important day," Mr. Sloan said, with fingers

MR. SLOAN gives his 1902 Benz car an outing on the new motorway.



Dad used the Commer for day trips, and then on longer trips to Northern France. Once being flown in the old Silver City aircraft, from Lydd to Le Touquet, and then trained down to northern Italy. He and friends, then drove back home, taking three weeks. To get it on the plane, the body had to be removed from the chassis, and the two parts loaded separately.

Another use of the Commer, was as a tender vehicle for the 1902 Benz when taking part in the Veteran Car, London to Brighton run in November. This involved travelling from Newport Pagnell to London, trailing the Benz, then making its way down to Brighton, and finally trailing the Benz back, with party, from Brighton to Newport Pagnell. The Benz is now in the Mercedes Benz Museum, Stuttgart.

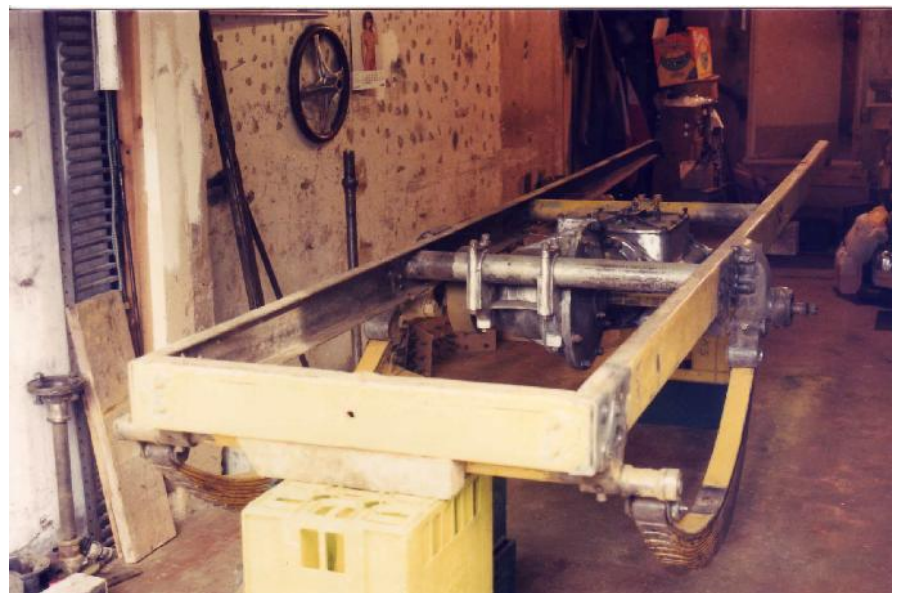


In 1968 my father purchased what became the Royal Wells Inn, Tunbridge Wells, and to help finance this project the Benz was sold along with other cars. The Commer remained! Not used much till the mid 70's, due to the time consuming business, when again he started on his trips to northern France.

By 1983 he passed the Commer onto myself, and in 1985 I completed in my first London to Brighton. I should mention here the Commer factory, entered the Commer in the first Commercial Vehicle London to Brighton of 1962. After that I decided it needed some considerable refurbishment, so in the winter of 1986/87, I and a friend took on the rolling chassis, while my father and a friend took on the body. Think we did a reasonable job, as what you see here today is 22 years old, although there has been some touching up here and there.



Back to Basics



All coming together



Not as brave as my father, I don't take the Commer abroad, or too far afield. We have competed in the London to Brighton since 1987, except for once, when not entered.

We do a number of summer day trips, or should I say Sunday pub crawls. Now with a number of drivers, this is now more pleasant for myself.

The engine was rebuilt in the 90's, due the front crank bearing disintegrating, on the way back from Brighton. The pre select Linley gearbox bearings were replaced five years ago. All the gears were found to be still in good condition.

Two final points:-

We do not trail the Commer - it's driven everywhere, now made much easier for me, as there are now three other drivers.

We are very fortunate, in the fact that this is an original vehicle, with only few parts being replaced, most obviously the lighting, which is converted to electric for convenience



This picture shows the
Commer at the back of the
Earl of Lonsdale's fleet
outside Lowther Castle

In the third paragraph of the following article the writer talks of travelling in the 1909 CommerCar estate bus

THE VETERAN AND VINTAGE MAGAZINE

FIRST LONDON-BRIGHTON RUN OF THE HISTORIC COMMERCIAL VEHICLE CLUB, MAY 13

by T. R. NICHOLSON



1920 "K" type L.G.O.C. 46-seat open top DD bus, entered by the Museum of British Transport, London—Photo by Motor Transport.

THERE WAS AN EXCELLENT ENTRY of 52 vehicles for this first London-Brighton run, and although 30 were of pre-1930 vintage (much more hardly-used, be it remembered, than the average private car), all the starters finished.

The National Benzole Trophy, presented by a firm which gave the event enthusiastic support, went to London Transport's own 1937 Regent STL-class double-decker bus: a Number 43 which according to its destination board was on its way to London Bridge. The runner-up (by a mere half mark) and winner of the *Transport World* Trophy was Foden's rare and delightful 1916 steam platform lorry. Its maximum speed of 10 m.p.h. meant that it and its white-overalled crew arrived in Brighton long after anyone else; to be exact, nearly 64 hours after its departure, when it was greeted on the Madeira Drive by a chorus of bells, whistles, klaxons, and cheers from a crowd of 5,000 spectators and competitors.

The writer, one of a load of eight, started from the British Transport Commission Museum at Clapham Common in the oldest vehicle participating: a 1909 Commer Car shooting-brake-cum-station-bus. Its construction and character were such as to have rendered imperceptible its passengers' transition from railway carriage to road carriage. The comfortable, greenhouse-like, wooden-panelled passengers' compartment was an early railway coach to the life, inside and out, even down to the window straps, while the ride and the noise on solid tyres made it easy to imagine that the coach had somehow strayed from the permanent way on to the highway. Though the comfortable cruising speed was only about 15-20 m.p.h., the low-speed pulling power was immense, most hills being surmountable in top gear, and Pyecombe, the dread of many early cars on the November veteran car run, climbed easily in third. The brakes, too, were good; though Reigate Hill called for bottom gear to help them. In this speed, at a slow walking-pace, we descended in stately fashion into the town in a haze of charring brake-lining, the while casting anxious glances aft towards various enormous and ancient machines bearing down on us from the rear. This is not an easy vehicle to drive: it is impossible to make a clean upward gearchange, and there is no foot throttle.

Only two incidents were visible from the Commer. The Montagu Motor Museum's attractive 1922 Maxwell *char-a-bancs*—on the road for the first time for over 30 years—was found with its bonnet open in a layby near Gatwick, and K. Blacker's handsome 1927 Leyland Lion coach broke its fan belt and proceeded for a while on the end of a tow-rope. However, both machines finished under their own steam. A 1914 F.W.D. (Four Wheel Drive) chassis made the whole journey on the platform of another early lorry. Among the most interesting of the other starters were a Trojan Travellers' Brougham of 1926, the endearingly hideous De Dion Bouton road-sweeper of 1922, ex-Ecurie Menton Corporation, acquired there by an Englishman who must have seemed madder than most and driven heroically back to England in five days, and London Transport's open-top double-decker K-type A.E.C. of 1920. This splendid machine was spoiled only by the inept garb of its passengers. Period dress fits into this occasion, but surely a very little extra trouble could have ensured that the dress was as accurately in-period, complete and perfect as the bus? The first arrival at Brighton was a 1920 Leyland fire engine; in all, five fire appliances made the run including a 1911 Belsize.

Although this run was the first of its kind, Vintage cars turned out to follow it or watch it go by in almost the same numbers as they do in November. Some particularly rare vehicles among the flock of seagulls were a 1923 four-seater Morgan, a circa 1931 Brooklands-bodied Talbot 90, and a very nicely turned-out Avon Standard two-seater of the same vintage. No doubt the show of commercial and private vehicles will be finer still in future years.

Alderman T. Leek, who presented the prizes on behalf of the Brighton Corporation, expressed the hope that the day's proceedings would become an annual event. Replying on behalf of the Club, the President, Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, said that they had every intention of doing so, and, in appealing for Associate Members, pointed out that one of the advantages of such membership would be a chance to ride in one of the club vehicles on the Run.



1933 Sentinel steam winch wagon owned by J. Hutchins
Photo by Motor Transport.