

Vehicle Profile: 519 BTA

An initial look at a vehicle in
the TV&GWOT Collection



This bus, Fleet No. 1967, had the distinction of being the last rear entrance double-deck vehicle delivered new to the Western & Southern National Companies and was first licenced on 1 May 1960. 1967 and sister vehicle 1966 (518BTA) had Bristol FS-type chassis and were the last two of an order for nineteen 60-seat rear entrance double deck Bristol Lodekkas both being first licenced on 1 May 1960, the others being of the earlier LD type Nos. 1948-65 (registered 501-17BTA and first licenced over the period between July and December 1959).

The Bristol **FS** chassis designation indicated that these vehicles had a **F**lat lower deck floors and were built to the **S**horter overall length option of 27ft. The 30ft version was designated FL. Earlier LD type Lodekkas had a slightly sunken lower deck central gangway which resulted in a possible trip hazard, whereas the FS flat floor was achieved by replacing the rear axle leaf springs by air suspension bags located under the foot rests of the sideways facing seats over the rear axle, which resulted in a constant overall height of 13ft. 3¾in. compared to the range of the LD height between 13ft. 3¾in. and 13ft 5in. depending whether the bus was fully laden or unladen.

Both FSs were delivered new to Western National's Taunton depot and initially were allocated to Service 266 to Glastonbury (1966) and Service 203 to Wellington and alternately on to Rockwell Green or Tonedale (1967). This resulted in a half hourly service to Wellington and hourly to the termini on the south western and north western outskirts of the town. 1967 remained allocated to Taunton for 10 years although it is known that it spent periods working from Trowbridge depot on loan to cover for major overhaul of Trowbridge based vehicles at Taunton. Following this, it spent a year based at Dartmouth depot, followed by six years in the Somerset & Dorset area, mainly at Weymouth, being withdrawn from public service at the end of 1974.

DATA PANEL

Registration: 519 BTA

Type: Bristol FS6G

Built: 1960

Engine: Gardner 6LW

Body: ECW H33/27RD

Operator: Western National Omnibus Co.
(Southern National Ltd after 1983)

17 years was the normal operational life span for service buses in the 'National' fleets but 1967 (along with 1966) was converted for driver training which involved removing the cab rear window in the bulkhead, cutting an access way in the lower part of this bulkhead and re-siting the main switch and voltage regulator box on the lower deck passenger area front bulkhead and installation of a handbrake lever, loud speaker and instructor's high chair immediately behind the cab. In this role, 1967 continued to be used for another 16 years, approximately 6 years at Taunton, more than 9 years at Weymouth and short periods at Yeovil and Bruton. Over this period it passed from the Western National Omnibus Company (WNOC) which became a subsidiary of the National Bus Company in 1969 to Southern National Ltd which was formed to operate the Somerset & Dorset and Somerset & East Devon Areas of WNOC after privatisation which took place in March 1988, becoming part of the Cawlett Group.

TV&GWOT Chairman, Colin Billington, purchased 1967 for preservation in December 1991 and collected it from Taunton Depot on the 8th for the 128 mile journey to Berkshire. It was a very cold day and, with an ill-fitting front screen, even colder in the cab! It is on long-term loan to the Trust and restoration to 'in-service' condition has now started with the removal of the driver training gear, re-instatement of the bulkhead behind the driver's seat and external repainting as necessary.



Taken on 23 April 1962, this photograph shows 1967 in Taunton Bus Station on Service 203 to Rockwell Green via Wellington. [© G. Mead]