

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

Technical details

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.

He had to learn quickly about prototypes and mass production. With the help of Autodromo, a model maker from Pembrokeshire, and Vanquish, his contact with manufacturers in China, the project was launched with high hopes and the first prototype appeared in May 2011.

Inevitably, there were production delays and problems raising the finance. However, delivery is now expected by early October 2012.

Birmingham Standards

Despite being called the 'Birmingham Standard' bus, there was no such thing. Birmingham City Transport selected 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.

The models

Forward Models is producing five versions of these post-war buses, all in Birmingham livery. The earliest is GOE 647 from 1949, a Crossley which was the first to have horizontal window ventilators. A similar bus, JOJ 397 from 1950, was one of the last to have an exposed radiator. Only a few months younger, JOJ 533 is a Guy Arab with the well-known concealed radiator, based on a preserved example kept at The Transport Museum, Wythall. Another preserved bus, JOJ 548, has also been produced. Finally, in the same series is JOJ 598. All are the 26 feet long versions of buses allowed at the time.

All models have been given suitable advertisements for the period they represent, except JOJ 533, because before 1953 buses did not carry advertisements. Older residents from Birmingham will recognise local brands such as M&B beers, Levins floor coverings, and Fillerys toffee. Route numbers have been applied according to photographic evidence, including the famous Outer Circle (number 11) on JOJ 397. Route numbers 1, 9, 15A and 32 are also represented.

Future plans include producing some models in WMPTE livery and some with 'MOF' registrations. Re-badging the exposed radiator versions as Daimlers will permit versions in the liveries of Edinburgh, Hull, Newcastle and Coventry.

The detail

Thanks are due to the dozens of Birmingham bus enthusiasts, owners, preservationists and museum volunteers who contributed their time, photographs, technical data, memories, observations and funding. They will remain un-named, to avoid any blame for the compromises that have had to be made, but they deserve recognition for their welcome supporting role. Any inadequacies in the models are solely the responsibility of Forward Models.

Production problems meant innovation on a small scale. Rear view mirrors kept breaking off so the factory had to learn to produce minute parts in softer plastic. Just in case, each model will have a spare set. Some of the finer painted detail simply could not be achieved because the hand painting would have added too much to the cost.

The distinctive colours of the livery were a challenge. It was impossible to quote a standard international colour reference. Forward Models even had to invent its own names for the colours – ‘blackberry’ and ‘primrose’. After some trial and error, the factory somehow managed to produce authentic shades from the samples sent, including the khaki roof.

Much work was put into the transfers, and not just to make accurate copies of trade marks. The coat of arms has detail never seen before on a Birmingham model. There is subtle shading on destination blinds and advertisements to make them appear as if in natural light.

Forward Models is proud of its new model buses and hope they will satisfy all those who have waited so long for this iconic and well-loved bus.

Derek Perry
August 2012