

IDENTITY PARADE

Tillingbourne thrived in Surrey and neighbouring counties until the start of the 21st century. In imagining how it might be relaunched today, creative agency The MHD Partnership has shortened its name and conferred a flowing look that it hopes would suggest a smooth ride.

TILLING RE-BORN



Tillingbourne was one of the pre-deregulation independents that seemed to thrive in the years immediately after deregulation in October 1986, serving the mainly rural areas around Guildford in Surrey.

It began life in 1924 in Cranleigh as Tillingbourne Valley and painted its buses maroon until 1972, when a new owner relocated the base to Gomsall, expanded its geographical coverage, renamed it Tillingbourne Bus and changed its livery to blue, yellow and grey. In 1963/64, it had replaced its entire fleet with eight of London Transport's GS-class Guy Special 26-seaters and kept them until the early 1970s.

Relatively modest expansion from 1972 was followed by much more rapid growth after deregulation, especially with successful bids for tendered services on behalf of local authorities; among other places, this took its buses regularly as far afield as Reading.

Its vehicles included several Optare buses supplied new, including the MetroRider, Excel, Vecta-bodied MAN and Prisma-bodied Mercedes-Benz O405.

It had grown to operate 70 buses and employ 140 staff by 19 March 2001 when

operations ceased abruptly and the business was placed in administration. It had racked up a six-figure trading loss over the previous two years and the fleet turned out to be worth more than any potential buyer was prepared to bid for the company.

When imagining a new identity and livery design for Tillingbourne, MHD Partnership's account director, Mike Fletcher, says it started where its founders began 92 years ago.

'Tillingbourne is a bus company that owes its name to the local river — The Tilling Bourne — so it seemed fitting to take inspiration from the waterways,' he says. 'Unfortunately, when it came to the name itself, it came across as an awkward mouthful — and definitely something that users were unlikely to say in full.

'Abbreviating to just TBC was something we considered initially (and subsequently rejected for being too corporate), so shortening it to a more user-friendly 'tilling bus' was decided on to help the project move on.

'The identity itself comes in the form of a strong lower case 't' shape — a graphic that has been crafted to flow like the river by which it is influenced. The chosen typeface

has a nice balance of softened edges to complement the livery but not so much so that it looks too comical or would lose legibility when scaled.

'The identity can be used on its own as an icon in advertising and also with the descriptive 'tilling bus' wording in more design- or corporate-led communication. It also incorporates a very subtle arc of darker blue shading to add a little depth to the logo mark.

'This relatively simple livery execution is an evolution of the existing application, primarily seen through keeping the original recognisable colour palette of blue and yellow,' he adds.

'The yellow really pops out against the darker background, while the organic lines transform the bus from its usual angular shape to something more welcoming. The windows and door areas have been used to create the flowing 'river' shape that runs through the vehicle's body.'

Fletcher says the livery ties in nicely with the 'go with the flow...' strapline, supporting the waterways theme and further helps to build an identity for a bus that he believes promises to deliver a smooth and relaxed journey.

Those who know their British bus history, however, might expect a Tilling bus to be green or red. ■



Tillingbourne 108 (P108 OPX), an Optare Vecta-bodied MAN, in Reading, with a Reading Mainline Routemaster just visible behind. MARK LYONS

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