

# OVER 50 YEARS IN SAFETY

## D.C. Dean

In March 1940, at the age of 14, I started my first job as an unindentured motor mechanic at Station Garage, Takeley, part of the company of D.A. Fyfe & Co. Ltd. corn, coal and patent forage merchants of Takeley, Essex. The company at that time operated a fleet of O type and WTL type Bedfords, horse drawn trailers and also used steam engines for towing the chaff cutters to the farms. As the factory was situated on the south side of the A120 road, a private railway siding was also used.

As an apprentice we had to do all aspects of the motor trade and if work was short in the garage due to fuel rationing, we had to assist in factory maintenance. In the boiler house were two boilers for steaming the chaff in large pots some 30ft high by 12ft diameter. The firm had an old gas engine, started by an Austin Seven engine, and an old Ruston diesel engine, plus, as a back-up an old portable steam engine. These were used to drive the shafting in the factory to work the mixers, chaff cutters and elevators taking the chaff to the top floor.

Two of the accompanying photographs show vehicles loaded with trussed hay. In those days grass was cut, turned, and made into hay, swept up by a tractor sweep or carted to a stack in the corner of the field. Fyfes would purchase the stack which was then cut up by a hay-tier with a large shaped knife to a size approx 3ft by 2ft and about 18in thick. The hay was then pressed and tied up into trusses. It was then loaded onto our lorries which delivered it, also the mixed chaff direct to customers, mainly in London. At one time we served a large number of United Dairies depots, the railway companies, breweries and small shops etc.

At the age of 17 I had to take odd loads to London and meet one of the drivers and bring the empty lorry home. The drivers would draw me a map, as of course during the war there were no road signs, but after

a few journeys you soon learnt the way. I also remember one or two hair-raising experiences during the Blitz, and at my age was pleased to get away from the London area at night.

At the age of 16 I joined the AFS as a part-time messenger at Hatfield Broad Oak and later became a part-time fireman at 17 when the NFS was formed. I remember we had an old Standard car to tow the Coventry Climax trailer pump. We had training on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights and were on duty every fourth night.

When I was 18 I was called up for the Army on 4 May 1944 and was in the General Service Corp until finishing primary training and being assessed. As I was a mechanic I was sent to Rhyl (North Wales) for a driving test and was transferred to the Royal Artillery, first as a driver mechanic, and then trade tested to a Vehicle Mechanic Group A class 3, and was water-proofing all types of Army vehicles at the Royal Artillery Motor Transport Section at Rhyl.

Later I was employed on various duties mainly as a convoy fitter, repairing vehicles that broke down on journeys to the docks. In some cases it meant fitting clutches and axles before loading them on to landing craft to go to France. Mostly the vehicles were loaded with supplies and ammunition.

After the war ended I was sent on an upgrading course at the Motor Fitters School at Aldershot and was passed as Vehicle mechanic II. I was later promoted and sent to the Royal Artillery Officer Cadet Training Unit as an MT instructor, and also carried out repairs to the diesel vehicles, often on schemes away from the camp. In April 1947 I was trade tested and passed as a Vehicle mechanic GRPA class I and remained at Deepcut in Hants until I was demobbed in 1948.

I returned to the Station Garage at Takeley again for approx 4 years repairing all classes of vehicles and making up body parts, ladder stays, corner brackets, tailboard hinges etc. I enjoyed using the forge, anvil and swage block - not many of these are seen today.

While I was in the services, Fyfe's had bought a Bedford OY type 3ton Army lorry and then as they became Commer agents were duty bound to run that make of vehicle.

During 1952 the forage and corn trade was gradually dying out and I thought

there would be a slump in the motor trade, so I decided to change my job and became the mechanic-in-charge at the Cambridge Co-op. at Bishops Stortford. At that time there were approx 35 vehicles with one or two outstationed at Dunmow and Ford End. We had Austin K2 and Morris Commercial coal lorries, Morris furniture vans and grocery delivery vans, Morris PV vans and some electric milk floats.

In April 1959 I changed jobs again and was employed by the Post Office as a mechanic class A, after passing their trade test etc. This job was varied with examination and repair of all types of Post Office vehicles. In the Bishops Stortford garage we serviced both postal and engineering vehicles, mainly Morris type Z vans, Minors, J2, LD and some lorries also Karrier gang vehicles. We had vehicles outstationed at Dunmow, Elsenham, and Harlow. Later Harlow had its own workshop, but the engineering vehicles were still based at Bishops Stortford.

It was during my stay with the Post Office that I gained a first class City & Guilds mechanics certificate and also passed the IMI examination. I later joined the Institute of Road Transport Engineers as an associate member and technical engineer in the Engineering Council, later I was upgraded to an Incorporated Engineer.

At this stage in my life I felt my knowledge and experience was not being used to its maximum advantage for my interests in road safety. I began looking for other jobs and decided that a vehicle examiners life in the Department of Transport would suit me so I applied in an open competition in 1963 and was successful in passing the board, and as I was an established civil servant on the Post Office I was transferred to Ipswich in May 1964.

I seemed to fit into the job very well and found it rewarding. As an area vehicle examiner I carried out numerous accident investigations for the Suffolk Police and obviously examined Ipswich Corporation buses, Eastern Counties, Swallow Coaches, Bluebird Coaches and many more. I can also remember carrying out my first PSV driving test one of our duties in those days.

Early in 1965 I attended a promotion board which I passed, and in November was transferred to Gidea Park in the



Left: Fleet No.10 of D.A.Fyfe & Co. A Ford model AA loaded with trussed hay in 1939.

Right: This Bedford was No.16 in the Fyfe fleet and is again loaded with trussed hay.



VINTAGE ROADSCENE



Metropolitan Traffic Area, This was a busier area and had London Transport garages in Romford, Leyton and Loughton. In those days the buses were RF, RT and RTLs, but later of course the Routemaster was operated.

One of our tasks in this district was road checks on laden goods vehicles in a large lay-by at Gallows Corner, Romford on the Eastern Avenue. The vehicles would be weighed axle by axle and gross vehicle weight. All aspects of the vehicle were recorded - body type (van, sided lorry, platform, container, tanker, etc). Then the tyre sizes and ply rating, number of axles, length of springs, number of leaves, and where known the make. The vehicle was measured for length, width, distance from cab to rear of body, wheelbase and rear overhang. A brake test on a Tapley meter was carried out. All this information was recorded and sent on a pro-forma to HQ and the results analysed with other areas. Consultations with manufacturers followed and the first standard lists were produced for vehicles and trailers in preparation for the start of the Heavy Goods Testing on 1 October 1968.

I was requested to help out at Purfleet HGVTs (Heavy Goods Vehicle Testing Station), and was in attendance when Mr Swindler opened the station in 1968. Later in that year I was transferred back to the Eastern Traffic Area and was a relief manager at Chelmsford, Ipswich, Norwich, Downham Market, and Royston. This was most interesting and I met many operators and staff. It also became apparent that the



*Top left:* The author in Army days.

*Top right:* No.25 in the Fyfe fleet in 1948 - A Commer Q4.

*Centre:* A carnival float of Cambridge Co-op. An Austin K2 from Bishops Stortford garage.

*Right:* The WD 3ton Bedford, many of which were repaired by the author.

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testing standards varied from station to station and problems arose for operators presenting vehicles to three or four different stations. Mr Toyne and Mr O.V. Jones in HQ soon became aware of the situation and a watch was kept on various stations, but it was decided that a National Standards Control Organisation was necessary.

Early in 1971 a promotion board for senior vehicle examiner posts was circulated and I was included in the list for the Selection Board. I passed this and was offered the post of National Standards Control Officer based at the Training School at Stanmore, but due to the nature of the post it was transferred to the HQ in Southwark Street, London. This was mainly due to engineers being based there and information passed both ways quickly. My job was to visit all testing stations, check the standards and report back to HQ and the Training School and also instruct the staff on the standards the department required. This was an interesting job but meant a lot of travelling as I visited every HGVT station in the country, and, of course, I could tell many stories!

In 1974 I assisted in compiling the first standard control report on heavy goods testing. Many charts and statistics were used to compare stations and defect failure variations. For my assistance I had a copy of a personally signed certificate by Mr D.V. Jones CENG. .MiMECHE Superintending Engineer as a keepsake. Obviously this was not a post one could hold for long periods due to the travelling and family commitments, so in 1974 I was offered a post as senior Vehicle Examiner in the Chelmsford area, near where I was living.

I carried on in this post until passing an Area Mechanical Engineers Board (now regraded SPTO). I was then posted to Edmonton HGVT station as Station Manager in 1977 when I then moved to Bromyard Avenue, Acton in 1979 covering an area of West London which included Aldenham LTE Works, High Wycombe, Watford, etc.

I spent many hours re-certificating London Transport buses at Aldenham, also conducting stability tests. The buses mainly certified were Routmaster, MCW, Titan and Daimler Fleetline and of course many other makes for private operators. I conducted over 300 stability tests on psv vehicles in my service and certified over 2,000 buses.

On the reorganisation of the department and change of name to Vehicle Inspectorate I was transferred from Acton to Purfleet as District Manager, and remained there until I retired from the Civil Service on 31 December 1989, having worked 34 years for the Government.

Since retirement to the present day I have worked part-time for a small firm, Station Coachworks at Great Dunmow. It seems to keep one going with certain responsibilities and a reason to keep active.

I can assure any young apprentice that a road transport engineer has a very

rewarding job. Things are not always a bed of roses, and I have had bad times as well as good, but one must stick to the task with determination, good humour and civility.

*Far Right: A Leyland Tiger with Padane body on tilt test at Aldenham*

*Right: A Scania with East Lancs body on tilt test at Ensign Bus, Purfleet, with top deck laden.*

*Lower right: The last bus I certified - A 1947 Bedford OB of County Coaches, Brentwood.*

*Bottom: The first vehicle being tested at the Purfleet HGVTs in October 1968.*

