

# a Magical Mystery Bus



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How many students can you cram into a Mini? Quite a few, if you turn it into a bus first.

This has to be the least Mini-like Mini-based vehicle ever. Even the Outspan fibreglass promotional mobile oranges looked more like a Mini than this bus does.

Not only did we get to examine this delightful oddity, but we got to test-drive it as well, courtesy of its current custodian, Chris Hollier from Norfolk, England.

It was designed and built by Alexander (Sandy) Fraser in the 1980s for use in parades and fetes, giving rides for charity

fundraising events - collecting a few coins from the parents of each load of screaming, sugar-buzzed children. Fraser started off making Morgan-inspired three-wheelers using Mini power. He progressed to forming Lion Omnibuses, which made around forty two-thirds-scale vintage-style buses and trucks. The 009 number stamped on the cast ID plate suggests this is the ninth offering from the Lion Omnibus company, built in 1987.

One of the most intriguing of these was a small replica Royal Air Force AEC Matador truck, built to tow trailers-full of tourists around the Duxford aerodrome and museum: that particular trucklet had a Mini engine fitted sideways (longitudinally... oh, you know what I mean, North-South) with the driveshafts extended backwards and forwards to live axles, to provide four wheel drive. Eccentric but brilliant.

So, back to the Mini Bus. A fair deal of thought has gone into the practicalities of the design: the suspension is fairly stiff so that it doesn't fall over, and the cooling system is rather more substantial than the usual Mini arrangement.

Opening the piano-hinged fibreglass bonnet, behind the imposing radiator grille, reveals a cavernous empty space with a diminutive A-series engine at the bottom. The radiator itself is a large custom affair, with its construction of tubes resembling

a transmission cooler or fridge evaporator, more than a conventional car radiator. The size of the radiator is enhanced by the long radiator hoses - the more coolant the better - while an electric fan is more efficient than an engine-driven one anyway.

The engine is a stock 998cc, and was hauled out of a donor Mini, complete with the gear-box and transmission. The ability to take an entire front-drive drivetrain out as a neat package more or less started with the Mini, so it's no surprise so many have been used for one-off creations.

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