



## Hot competition produces 'National' hero as Lee triumphs

Sunday 3rd September 2023 in Blackpool will be remembered for a lot of good reasons. It was the 55th running of the UK Bus Driver of the Year competition, there was close to a maximum entry of 117 (with 87 for the first time!), the weather was superb and so was the competition.

The practical driving element of the day got underway at 0700hrs from the 'Middlewalk Bus Station' as the early morning mist began to rise, heralding a beautiful late summer day of wall to wall sunshine. The marshals and officials had been hard at work since 6am laying out the 2mile course of carefully planned practical exercises which would test every aspect of bus driving skills required to safely negotiate today's traffic conditions.

The driving is not against the clock – all tests relate to safety and to damage avoidance, measuring the driver's ability to judge millimetre accuracy. The title of Bus Driver of the Year 2023 would have to be really earned.

However, driving skilfully is only part of the competition as there is an equally daunting theory test for every competitor during the day. In the event of a close practical competition, having the required level of theory expertise could make all the difference...

Whoever was going to win in 2023 was going to have to be very good indeed, and so it transpired..... The driving competition was finished by 12.15pm and the theory tests soon after as the task of collating the results got underway, and by 4pm the awards ceremony began as planned, with the room full of competitors, families and work colleagues gathered in excited anticipation. As the presentations began, in reverse order as usual, the tension was



● Bus Driver of the Year overall winner 2023 **Lee Grantham** celebrates the announcement with his partner Sarah

**bus driver of the year**   
championing excellence since 1967

building until there was just the one prize left to announce – "The 2023 UK Bus Driver of the Year is... **Lee Grantham of National Express Bus!**"

Following the excitement, congratulations and photos of the winners, all the finalists returned to their depots with pride, having been finalists in the top UK bus driving competition.

A delighted Lee later told Middle Walk Times "I loved every moment in Blackpool, the course was perfect, well planned and well marshalled, the weather was superb and so was the company of everyone there. To win 'Bus Driver of the Year' is truly amazing, officially the best bus driver in the UK, it is hard to believe!

"I would like to really thank every person behind BDoY – the organisers, officials, marshals, helpers and all the other drivers without whom we wouldn't have such an great competition. Winning has been a dream come true and I'm going to spend some of the prize money on a family holiday abroad in 2024!"

**Congratulations to Lee and all the winners and finalists in the 2023 Bus Driver of the Year competition, we look forward to seeing you all again in 2024. Safe driving!**

### Runner up – 2nd overall: Gary Black, Lothian Buses (City)

"It was my first time entering BDoY and I still can't believe I came second. It was an anxious time between the end of the theory test and the presentation because I knew I'd made a few silly mistakes, so I was not expecting that result at all! It was a very enjoyable competition and it has been great receiving congratulations from colleagues and customers back home. I definitely hope to be at Blackpool again in 2024 to try again!"



### 3rd overall: Tom Gilhooley, Lothian buses (East coast)

"The competition was excellent and very well organised. It was my second time at Blackpool and the standards are so high I would have been delighted to be in the top five, let alone third! My employer, Lothian Buses and my depot, East Coast, were equally pleased for all three of their drivers in this year's final and I was delighted to receive their congratulations and those of some of my customers. Our success was shown on the screens at all the depots, in the local papers and on Facebook too."



### 4th overall: Andy Evered, First Wales and West

"I thought that the course was very fair and really challenging. When I got back to my depot there was a very positive reaction from managers and my workmates, which I enjoyed! The whole event was very well organised and I would recommend anyone to take part if given the opportunity. I definitely hope to return."



### 5th overall: Raj Viswanathan, Go Ahead London

"I am extremely proud to have come first in both the London and Go Ahead Group categories as I always enjoy representing the company over the busy and challenging Blackpool weekend, competing against so many other professionals. Bus driving is a responsible and rewarding job and I am thrilled with this year's recognition. I am also honoured to have featured in our bus driver recruitment campaign and hope that my success will inspire others to take up this career."



## A vintage year!

**After the packs for the 2023 BDoY competition were sent out there was the usual lull whilst members of the council wondered how many competitors we would have. 2022 was a good recovery after Covid, the first event since 2019 and we were very pleased to receive 89 entries.**

For 2023 we were very pleasantly surprised as the numbers grew to the point we were seriously having to consider a cut-off on how many entries we could confidently handle, which is around 120. On the day we had 111 taking part, 87 of whom were competing in the national final for the first time.

This was a tremendous turnout on a day which gave us the best of weather and the best of competitions, a vintage year indeed.

I would like to personally thank all of the bus companies which put forward drivers for the finals and helped them to prepare and practice. The standards required are very high and it is credit to everybody involved back in the depots that the 2023 competition was so good.

To previous competitors we are delighted to welcome you back and to the 87 first time participants we sincerely hope that the whole weekend whetted your appetite and that you will be back again in 2024 with the experience to challenge for

the title – the UK Bus Driver of The Year, the very best of the best!

Following such a busy and successful event I must thank the organising team without whom it simply would not happen. The council members work hard all year on the planning and preparation. The route, manoeuvres and questions on the day are only part of it. Organising the accommodation, the gala dinner, the guests, the award ceremony, the trophies, the sponsorships and the prizes all takes a tremendous amount of effort. On the day we also have an army of volunteer marshals and helpers and you are all to be congratulated for how well the day went.

Thank you also to all our award sponsors and to the companies which provided the beautifully turned-out buses for the event. Choosing winners for the best bus prizes grows ever more difficult!

Preparation is well under way for the 2024 final, our 56th, and after such a large entry and an excellent competition this year I would encourage you to send in your entries as soon as possible as there is a real possibility that this year the bus will be full!

*Until then, good health and safe driving.*

**Joe Mackie OBE**  
Chairman, UK Bus Driver of the Year Association

## Happy retirement Carol

2023 marked the centenary of BDoY sponsor the Transport Benevolent Fund (tbf) and it also marked the retirement of their representative



Carol Titherington, which she announced at the drivers' briefing. Thank you for all you have done, Carol, everyone at BDoY wishes you a long and happy retirement!





# All our winners from the 2023 UK Bus Driver of the Year competition...

Awards presented by Andrew Jarvis - COE of First Bus.

## Runner-up: Gary Black Lothian Buses - Lothian City

- The BDoY Trophy £1,500
  - Highest-placed competitor from an ALBUM company The ALBUM Trophy £1,000
  - Highest-placed competitor from a depot in Scotland The Joe Mackie Shield £100
- (Winning a total of £2,600)



## Bus Driver of the Year 2023: Lee Grantham National Express Bus

- The Coventry Trophy - donated by Coventry Road Accident Prevention Council
  - The Road Operators' Safety Council Award £1,500
  - The Unite Trophy £1,500
  - The John Boxall Medallion - donated by the BDoY Council
  - Highest-placed competitor from National Express The National Express Trophy £1,000
  - Highest-placed competitor from a depot in England The Giles Fearnley Shield £100
- (Winning a total of £4,100)



**bus driver**  
of the year   
championing excellence since 1967

● We are the Champions.



## Third Place: Thomas Gilhooley Lothian Buses - East Coast Buses

- The BDoY Trophy £1,000
- (Winning a total of £1,000)



## Fourth Place: Andy Evered First Wales and West

- The BDoY Trophy £750
  - Highest-placed competitor from FirstBus The FirstBus Trophy £1,000
- (Winning a total of £1,750)

## Fifth Place: Raj Viswanathan Go Ahead London

- The BDoY Trophy £500
  - Highest-placed competitor from a company in membership of the Road Operators' Safety Council The ROSCO Trophy £500
  - Highest-placed competitor from London Buses The London Buses Cup £1,000
  - Highest-placed competitor from Go-Ahead The Go-Ahead Trophy £1,000
- (Winning a total of £3,000)

- Second highest-placed competitor from Go-Ahead  
Second highest-placed competitor from London Buses  
Muhammad Harun, Go Ahead London
- The Go-Ahead Shield £500
  - The London Buses Shield £500
- (Winning a total of £1,000)



- Second highest-placed competitor from Stagecoach  
Anthony Unsworth, Stagecoach Manchester
- The Stagecoach Shield £500



- Highest-placed competitor from Stagecoach  
Robert Lysaght, Stagecoach Manchester
- The Stagecoach Trophy £1,000



- Second highest-placed competitor from RATP Dev  
Harsh Shah, RATP Dev Transit London
- The RATP Dev Shield £500

- The Bryan Constable Award**  
For the best-presented buses in use at the National Final
- (a) Newly-delivered or up to one-year old  
**First Potteries, BN72 TUJ**
- (b) One to five years old  
**First East of England, YN69 XZY**
- (c) Over five years old  
**McGill's Midland Bluebird, BX64 WHZ**
- All will receive commemorative plaques



● The one year old category winner.

- Second highest-placed competitor from FirstBus  
David Nairn, First North and West Yorkshire
- The FirstGroup Shield £500



- Best Theory Test**  
Ian Field, Stagecoach East Scotland
- The BDoY Trophy £300



- Highest-placed competitor from a depot in Wales  
Michael McDonnell, First Cymru
- The Donald Macdonald Memorial Shield £100



- Second highest-placed competitor from National Express  
Liam Manuell, National Express Bus
- The National Express Trophy £500



- Highest-placed competitor from RATP Dev  
Bhim Raj Rai, RATP Dev Transit London
- The RATP Dev Trophy £1,000



- Highest-placed competitor from McGill's  
Steven Craig, McGill's Scotland West
- The Andy Ramsey Trophy £1,000



- Second highest-placed competitor from McGill's  
John Black, McGill's Dundee
- The McGill's Runner-up Shield £500



# Our Guest of Honour

**Guest of Honour at the Gala Dinner on Saturday evening The Worshipful, the Mayor of Blackpool, Councillor Gillian Campbell gave a very inspiring reply to the Chairman Joe Mackie's welcome and introductions. She has very kindly allowed us to reproduce this version in Middle Walk Times for the enjoyment of those who were not able to attend in person:**

"Distinguished guests, colleagues and friends, it is a tremendous honour to stand before you at this prestigious Bus Driver of the Year Competition Gala Dinner, celebrating the exceptional dedication and skills of our remarkable bus drivers. I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Chairman of this event for his tireless efforts in recognising the driving force behind our public transportation system.

"As we gather together, it is imperative that we acknowledge the incredible significance of our bus drivers, especially in the face of unprecedented challenges. Throughout the pandemic, when the world came to a halt, our bus drivers stood strong on the front lines, transporting our key workers to their essential roles without hesitation. Their unwavering commitment ensured that doctors, nurses, grocery store employees

• *The Worshipful, the Mayor of Blackpool, Councillor Gillian Campbell.*

and countless others could reach their destinations safely, enabling our communities to keep moving forward even during those most uncertain times. "The transportation industry, with its intricate web of connections, is the backbone of our economic vitality. It links businesses to customers, employees to workplaces and visitors to our vibrant towns and cities.

"As we honour the achievements of the UK Bus Driver of the Year competitors let us also celebrate every driver who has taken the helm of these vehicles, navigating our streets and roads with skill, precision, and a deep sense of responsibility. They are the embodiment

of perseverance, the unsung champions of our community who have, quite literally, driven us through the storm. "So, let this evening not only be a tribute to their remarkable achievements but also a reminder of the indomitable spirit that defines the industry. Let us stand united in our appreciation for these drivers, as well as for the vital transportation industry that sustains our local economy.

"Thank you and congratulations to all our bus drivers."

We thank you, Mayor, for gracing us with your presence and for these very inspiring words, so sincerely delivered.

## Welcomes • Farewells • Tributes

### BDoY Council updates from the Chairman

• Soon after the national competition in 2022 **Bryan Constable** announced his decision to step down as a Council Member and Hon. Vice President. I visited Bryan and his wife Margaret in the summer to thank him for his 35 years at BDoY and to present him with a trophy commemorating his contribution to the event.



Amongst other responsibilities Chris has judged the buses loaned to us for the competition. Prior to presenting those prizes this year we presented Chris with an award for his excellent service to BDoY.

• Succeeding Chris on the Council is **Gerallt Evans**, Traffic Commissioner, who was our guest at the event this year. We extend a very warm welcome to Gerallt and thank him for stepping into the role with such enthusiasm.



• Honorary President **John Boxall** and his wife Helen were not able to be at the event this year as the journey is now getting quite demanding on their mobility. However, John sent his best wishes to all.

#### Bill Holmes

Sadly, after a short illness Bill Holmes passed away earlier in 2023. Bill was a Council member for 24 years and a familiar figure at the start of the competition, ensuring the buses were at the start point on time and that the first bus departed right on schedule. Bill was also a regular at some of the local competitions including the Lothian competition in Edinburgh. Bill's contribution to BDoY and his friendship will be greatly missed.

