



Middle Walk Times

A memento of UK Bus Driver of the Year 2024

Hard work pays off for Thomas!

The UK Bus Driver of the Year Final is the culmination of a year of preparations, not only by the organising team but also by bus companies and drivers across the whole of the UK. From humble beginnings as a local event in Coventry, (as our honorary president John Boxall relates inside), it has evolved into today's most prestigious competition for bus drivers in the UK.

To reach the final is recognition of a competitor's high levels of skill, of which they should be very proud; to win an award is the ambition of every finalist and to win the title and be crowned 'The UK Bus Driver of the Year' on the day is a huge achievement for which everybody involved should share the pride – the driver, their trainers and their company.

The 2024 Final, the 56th, was another excellent event. The weekend began on the Saturday with wall-to-wall sunshine as the drivers, buses and organisers assembled once again at The Imperial Hotel in Blackpool, everyone buzzing with excitement, meeting old friends, making new ones and looking forward to the Gala Dinner later.

After an excellent evening, Sunday dawned dull but warm, perfect conditions for the competition - no glare to contend with but a pleasant day. The organisers and marshals were out very early, setting up the carefully planned course ready to test driving skills which are needed every day at work; there's a real purpose to this competition which extends well beyond winning prizes (good though that is!).

Having successfully passed the mandatory breathalyser test, the first competitor left the start line at 8am and the competition was underway. Once the practical driving test is completed there is a comprehensive theory test which some find even more daunting. The winners really do earn their awards!



● "The 2024 UK Bus Driver of the Year is... **Thomas Gilhooley** of Lothian East Coast Buses."



● Thomas on his winning drive.

bus driver
of the year 
championing excellence since 1967

Behind the scenes there is a huge amount of work happening too, with all the results being collated, checked and double-checked before, finally, the awards ceremony at around 4pm, with the work all done and the excitement at its peak!

Prizes are presented in reverse order with lots of anticipation until there is just the one prize left to announce...

Much excitement, congratulations, commiserations and photo taking follows before everyone finally departs for home, everyone hoping to get another chance next year. The organisers hope you all do too!

We caught up with winner Thomas Gilhooley after the event to ask him for his reflections and how his win had been taken back in the depot. Thomas told us...

"As in previous years when I have competed, the competition was excellently run and the standard of drivers was very high. To be crowned the best driver in the UK was an emotional moment for me but very exciting at the same time."

On my return to Scotland and East Coast Buses, everybody was very kind with their praise and messages of congratulations. The media screens at all the Lothian depots, the local newspapers and Forth 1 radio all carried news about me winning and the response has been overwhelming locally."

Lothian Buses media even interviewed me for their newsletter and podcast! With the prize money I bought myself a new golf trolley and a new TV for the house! The rest has been set aside until we decide what to do with it."

It is a great honour to be 2024 Bus Driver of the year and I'm going to do my best to live up to the title. Thank you again to everybody who made it all possible for me and all the competitors."

Congratulations to Thomas and all the winners and finalists in the 2024 UK Bus Driver of The Year Competition and we hope to see you all back to try again next year.

Thanks to you all!

Runner up – 2nd overall: Raj Viswanathan, Go Ahead London

"I am pleased to achieve 2nd place overall in 2024 and first in both the London and Go-Ahead Group categories for the second year running. This year, I also achieved 'Best Competitor from a depot in England' and 'Best Placed Theory Test Competitor', which is amazing. I am proud to represent Croydon Garage and be a role model for others in the industry. Driving a bus is very rewarding at Go-Ahead London where we care for our customers and connect the communities we serve. I look forward to taking part again next year."



3rd overall: Brian Mackie, Stagecoach East Scotland

"I have always enjoyed competing in the BDoY final and couldn't really believe I had managed to come 3rd overall and best Stagecoach driver this year, it was a really special moment in my 22 year career with them."



The support I received before, during and after the competition was brilliant and very welcome! When I returned to work I was delighted to receive a letter of congratulations and gift from my MD, Douglas Robertson. Many thanks to everyone involved in running the competition every year, we all very much appreciate it."

4th overall: Danny Bayley, National Express Coventry

"I'm extremely proud to have achieved 4th place overall, and highest placed National Express competitor on my first attempt at the National Final. It was a very enjoyable weekend, well structured, fair and a challenging competition! I've have had quite a few drivers approach me since my win to ask about what is involved, they clearly want to enter next year's competition! I'm very proud to have represented National Express Coventry at the national level and I am now looking forward to re-entering next year and hopefully finish even higher!"



5th overall: Clive Sutton, First North & West Yorkshire

I first competed in BDoY in 2023 and was placed 68th. I was quite disappointed as I knew I could do better. This year I was very pleased to come 5th overall and 1st for First Bus. My family, friends and colleagues were delighted for me too, and the management team at York Depot were pleased that I brought home some silverware and kindly gave me a gift voucher and a full page spread in our First bus magazine! I'm looking forward to applying for next year's competition as it is a great weekend for drivers to show their skills and meet new friends and I'd love to do even better!"



It is nine years, since we introduced our newsletter *Middle Walk Times* to the Bus Driver of the Year Competition to record the success, highlights and outcome of the Final. It was initially a four-page publication but in 2023 we extended to six pages giving better scope to cover the event and award winners.

Soon after the BDoY Council agreed to producing a newsletter I approached a friend and colleague, Kevin McCormick, who has spent many years in newspapers and marketing, to ask if he would lead on the newsletter project. I am pleased to say that he had no hesitation in agreeing to help and the 2017 newsletter was duly produced with printed copies available and also on our website.

Working together we gather the information and photographs from the day and plan the contents. Kevin writes, sets the general layout and arranges for the design and printing, all without charging a fee by way of supporting the BDoY National Final Competition. BDoY, and I are extremely grateful to Kevin for the professional production that we now enjoy. This year we also welcome Lothian Buses as sponsor of the newsletter graphics and print and thank them for their support.

In 2024 we introduced another change to how we promote the competition, by once again having our own printed programme. Council member Mike Morgan volunteered to lead this project and we would like to thank Mike for guiding the process which produced such an excellent programme.

Our thanks also to CBW and RouteOne for their coverage of the competition in Blackpool over the years.

Each year the Final begins with our **Gala Dinner** on the Saturday evening, always a most enjoyable event. I would like to thank



● The Worshipful The Mayor of Blackpool
Councillor Peter Hunter



● Joe Mackie.

our Guests of Honour for 2024 The Worshipful **The Mayor of Blackpool** Councillor Peter Hunter and Mayoress Anne-Marie Hunter for joining us and for your warm welcome and kind words.

Of the 100 competitors in 2024, 59 were competing in the National Final for the first time. This is a very encouraging number, showing the continuing interest in the competition and demonstrating the renewed determination to be crowned **The Best Bus Driver in the UK**.

Following such a busy and successful 2024 event I thank the whole organising team, (including this year's National Steward Chris Heaps who kindly stepped into the role) without whom it simply would not have happened. The council members work hard all year on the planning and preparation. The route, manoeuvres and questions on the day are only the tip of the iceberg - 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 the sponsors of our awards, to Phil Smith for presenting them and to the companies which provided the beautifully turned-out buses for the event.

Preparation is now under way for the 2025 event, our 57th National Final competition, and I look forward to receiving your entries and welcoming you to Blackpool in September.

Until then, good health, safe driving and a special **'Thank you'** to all the competitors in 2024.

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

MEET THE COUNCIL: *Your opportunity to get to know the people behind the BDoY competition*

"So, who dreamt up this course then?"

An introduction to Keith Fieldhouse, Operations Director

Ed: Keith, welcome to 'Meet the Council' and thanks for agreeing to be our first interviewee. How long have you been involved with BDoY and what is your role?

KF: About 15 years, and my current role is Operations Director of the National Final here at Blackpool and Vice Chairman, to stand in for Joe if needed.

Ed: What are the aims of BDoY? Why does this competition exist?

KF: As an organisation, our aim is to promote good customer service through drivers who have a great understanding of safety and excellent skills in bus driving. The competition enables us to thoroughly test these aspects of every bus driver entered and to reward those who set the highest standards in our industry.

Ed: What exactly does the Operations Director do?

KF: I design the exercises along the sea front

at Blackpool to represent real life problems that bus drivers experience daily.

I am also responsible for all operational aspects of the running of the Final on the day, from the correct setting up of the tests to ensuring that the marshals get their lunch packs!

Ed: How accurate must a competing driver be in order to do well?

KF: The margins for error are so small that getting a winner is sometimes as close as a couple of centimetres in the driving skills tests or a single answer in the theory test (set by my colleague Paul Martin). The standards are high but must always realistically reflect real life driving situations faced every day by bus drivers all over the country. We are constantly looking for improvements to our design of exercises to reflect current legislation and changing conditions on our roads.

Ed: The marshals clearly have an important role, how do you recruit them and do they require any special training?

KF: The key qualities of a marshal are accuracy and integrity, no special additional skills are needed. Our marshals are recruited from the



operating companies that send the drivers to compete at the National Final. Without their help on the day we wouldn't be able to run what is a great competition, so it is important that if a marshal agrees to help that they are available as promised. They are a huge asset to us and many can be relied on to help every year. However, we have occasionally been promised marshals who for some reason haven't turned up to help, causing us a shortfall and the associated difficulties.

From experience I know how exciting and rewarding marshalling can be so please volunteer and join us next year!

Ed: That's a great note on which to end, thank you very much Keith.

Ramblings from the President...

I am sorry to have missed the last two years' Bus Driver of the Year finals, not from lack of interest, but due to my limited mobility. I miss meeting with the BDoY family and drivers, some of whom have been coming for years. Congratulations to all the winners and all the drivers who took part this year, it was clearly a very good day.

The origins of the BDoY competition stretch back to a local road safety event in **Coventry** almost 60 years ago, arranged to boost the morale amongst drivers. Little did I know what a prestigious event it would become and thanks are due to so many people that have organised and supported it over the many years. Despite the many changes in the Bus Industry the event has survived, with a few ups and downs!

Were any of you there at **High Ercall**, the R.T.I.B training centre when drivers were concerned that one of the tests could not be done and I was challenged to do it?! Fortunately, my training stood me in good stead and I successfully completed the test, as I had the day before, and my reputation was intact!

Can anyone remember, again at **High Ercall**, the time when the farmer sprayed his fields with chicken manure the day before the final and it went everywhere

over the course and vehicles? That was a very smelly occasion!

Blackpool has its own memories, such as the year the course was laid out on the Saturday and then an overnight storm blew down all the barriers along Middle Walk and much of rest of the course. It

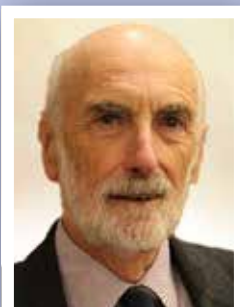
all had to be sorted before the competition could start next day.

The first year that the static tests were replaced with a **continuous test** it caused confusion and a very late finish! It took a long time to persuade the police to let us use the highway as part of the test...

Enough of the past, though it is all worth remembering. Thanks to the untiring work of the directors over the years and the support of drivers, companies, sponsors, marshals and stewards, the event has lasted for over **50 years**. It's in the good hands of the current board of directors and will hopefully last another 50 years. We look forward to welcoming you to Blackpool for another successful event in September, both old and new companies, drivers and family supporters. **Will you be there, making your own memories?**

I wish you well

John Boxall
Honorary President



Introducing Graeme Healy

We welcome Graeme Healy of Lothian Buses as the newest member of the BDoY Council and for those who have not yet had the opportunity to meet him this is a brief introduction:



Aged 50 and having spent 18 yrs with Lothian Buses from Driver to current role as Delegated Driving Examiner.

2017 - moved to Lothian's training department assisting with driver training including for the BDoY Final.

2019 - attended the Blackpool Final for the first time, assisting as a marshal and seeing a Lothian driver take the top prize!

2022 - following the Covid enforced break, the BDoY Final returned and Graeme took a bigger role in organising the local Lothian competition, marshalling at the Blackpool Final again.

2023 - invited to attend two of the Council meetings to observe the amount of work entailed behind the scenes.

2024 - the Council visited Lothian to observe the local competition. Graeme voted onto the BDoY Council

Graeme commented "I am delighted to become one of the newest members of the long-established team which plans and delivers this prestigious annual competition for drivers throughout the UK. I know it will be a lot of hard work, but I am looking forward to the challenge and am very grateful to have this opportunity to lend a hand."

All our winners from the 2024 UK BDoY

Awards presented by Phil Smith - Trustee of BDoY

Runner-up: Raj Viswanathan Go-Ahead, London

**The BDoY Trophy and £1,500
Best Theory Test Result**

- The BDoY Trophy and £300
- Highest-placed competitor from a depot in England**
- The Giles Fearnley Shield and £100
- Highest-placed Go-Ahead competitor**
- The Go-Ahead Trophy and £1,000
- Highest-placed London Buses competitor**
- The London Buses Cup and £1,000
(winning a total of £3,900)



Third Place: Brian Mackie Stagecoach East Scotland

**The BDoY Trophy £1,000
Highest-placed Stagecoach competitor**

- The Stagecoach Trophy and £1,000
(Winning a total of £2,000)



Bus Driver of the Year 2024: Thomas Gilhooley Lothian East Coast Buses

- **The Coventry Trophy** - donated by Coventry Road Accident Prevention Council
- **The Road Operators Safety Council Award** and £1,500
- **The Unite Trophy** and £1,500
- **The BDoY Trophy**
- **The John Boxall Medallion** - donated by the BDoY Council
- **Highest-placed competitor from a company in membership of The Road Operators Safety Council** Glass award and £500
- **Highest-placed competitor from an ALBUM member** Glass award and £1,000
- **Highest-placed competitor from a depot in Scotland**
The Joe Mackie Shield and £100
(Winning a total of £4,600)



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

Fourth Place: Danny Bayley National Express Coventry

- **The BDoY Trophy** and £750
- Highest-placed National Express competitor**
- The National Express Trophy and £1,000
(Winning a total of £1,750)

- Highest-placed competitor from a depot in Wales**
Daryl Jones - First Cymru
- The Rhys Thompson Shield and £100



Fifth Place: Clive Sutton First North & West Yorkshire

- **The BDoY Trophy** and £500
- Highest-placed FirstBus competitor**
- The FirstGroup Cup and £1,000
(winning a total of £1,500)



- Highest-placed RATP Dev competitor**
Bhim Rai
- RATP Dev Transit London
- The RATP Dev Cup
£1,000

Bus Driver of the Year competition...

the Road Operators Safety Council (ROSCO).



● All the winners from the 2024 competition.



**Second highest-placed
National Express competitor
Lee Grantham**
- National Express West Midlands
● The National Express Trophy and £500

**Second highest-placed
London Buses competitor
Joseph Jay - Go-Ahead London**
● The London Buses Shield and £500
**Second highest-placed Go-Ahead competitor
Joseph Jay - Go-Ahead London**
● The Go-Ahead Shield and £500



**Highest-placed
McGill's competitor
Gavin Justice**
- McGill's Midland Bluebird
● The Andy Ramsey
Memorial Shield and £500



**Second highest-placed
FirstBus competitor
Stuart Beetison - First West of England**
● The FirstGroup Shield and £500

**Second highest-placed
Stagecoach competitor
Mark Goodall**
- Stagecoach Bluebird
● The Stagecoach Shield
and £500



**Second highest-placed
RATP Dev competitor
Artur Stankiewicz**
- RATP Dev Transit London
● The RATP Dev Shield and
£500

**The Bryan
Constable Award**
Best-presented
buses in use at
the National Final



● The newly-delivered or up to one year
old category winner.

(a) Newly-delivered
or up to year old:
**First Manchester, Midlands &
South Yorkshire - BN24 ZWV**
(b) One to five years old:
**Stagecoach Merseyside &
South Lancashire - YX23 OVL**

(c) Over five years old:
**Lothian Buses,
- SN11 EAN**

● All will receive
commemorative plaques

Blackpool 2024



● "For what we are about to receive..."



● ...The First' electric buses...



● ...our BDoY 2024 venue...



● ...A helping hand...



● ...Up hilly...ah!...



● ...return to base, leader!...



● ...Smile - you're on Candid Camera!...



● Oh dear, too near!



● ...Spot-on!...