

Glimpses of the Past

by George Toms

3. The Brush "Pony"



I doubt if anyone at the Falcon Works has failed to see one of the busy three-wheeled battery electric vehicles which scurry around the site day in and day out.

Affectionately known as B.E.V.'s, they have been around for many years and like the labourer's old sweeping brush they are still as good as new despite replacement of major components, and some judicious cannibalisation over the years!

If Hitler had not invaded Russia in 1941, the Brush 'Pony' may never have been born, for it was as a result of Allied wartime "leasend" aid to Russia that the species was born. Its inspiration and parentage were the petrol-engined Lister three-wheeler industrial trucks of the 1930's, affectionately known as Listers. These had a direct drive to the front wheel and a flat rear platform which could be raised or lowered. Also familiar industrial transport in the 1920's and 1930's were the four-wheel battery electric platform trucks. Brush had at least two of the former on the works during the early part of World War 2. It was this pair

Engineer" journal described it. This no doubt led to orders. Catalogues were produced, one in particular was in the Dutch language and well illustrated. Production was brisk in the late 1940's and early 1950's under Brush Coachworks auspices and the 'Pony' continued as a sole survivor after the demise of that company, but the demand slowed as fuel shortages eased and disappeared altogether. Nevertheless in 1957 the B.E.V. department employed 24 people and occupied 8,250 square feet of floor space, being the smallest department of Brush.

Much was made of the fact that hand trucks could be replaced, and this was so to a point, in particular with regard to larger and heavier loads. One of the serious threats to the 'Pony' in industry was that of the fork-lift truck, in all its guises. In most places it now reigns supreme, but by a strange paradox the 'Pony' and the fork-lift truck live in harmony at the Falcon Works.

The Pony has reigned at the works for some forty-five years. When I arrived in 1960 there

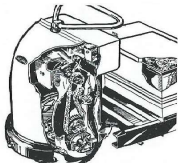
Right: Brush 'Pony' 1946.



Below: Arthur Tooley on one of the remaining ponies.



Cutaway showing construction.



of Listers which served the dynamo shops and carried sand bags to strategic points within wartime Brush.

The German advance into Russia resulted in a removal eastwards of Russian industry out of reach of the enemy. There was a need for safe forms of internal transport within munitions factories and the like, so the concept of the B.E.V. was put forward as an answer. The Allies were to supply the necessary vehicles, through the auspices of the British Ministry of Supply.

Brush were detailed to satisfy the need and it is believed that Mr Popham with Mr Senior (ex-Petters) devised the Brush B.E.V. version of the Lister. The resultant industrial truck can be seen in the accompanying wartime photograph. This was taken in November 1943 at the Meadow Lane end of the works. I understand that about a hundred or so vehicles were supplied to Russia.

The end of hostilities in 1945 did not realise a speedy return to peacetime conditions. There were fuel shortages, petrol rationing continued and an upsurge in demand for battery electric vehicles resulted. Brush rose to the challenge, offering a choice of 3 and 4 wheeled vehicles in a wide range of applications which included milk floats, dustcarts and hospital vehicles. Many were exported and the home market was well-supplied; both on and off the public highway. As recently as 1988 I was overtaken by a platform version at traffic lights in Nottingham, a late date for a registered 'Pony' indeed.

In 1946 the 'Pony' was introduced and "The

was a fleet of them bearing the then ubiquitous Brush green livery, and raised metallic fleet numbers on the nose canopies. When these "Ponies" wore out they were replaced.

"Pony" production was transferred to Burton on the Wold and thence to Crompton Electricians at Tredegar for a stay of some fourteen years. Production ceased about five years ago.

In recent years it has been the policy to keep the "Ponies" going at the Falcon Works as essential transport, particularly on stillage movement, trailer hauling, mail distribution and as a mobile "suds" tank serving C.M.S., to name several users. To ensure continuity second-hand vehicles were bought in under the watchful eye of Sieve Collinge (Salvage Officer, now retired) and much cannibalisation, combining, fabrication and modifying became standard practice.

A recent enquiry revealed a total of about 30 miscellaneous "Ponies" on the works with BEM owing about 20, and the other three companies on site the others.

Quite how long they will remain in service is not known, but at present there appears to be no threat to their continued existence - indeed the various Brush owners have taken to sprucing them up and certainly there is a continued need for them. The loss of two services were mourned last year when the canteen service withdrew Audrey's mobile shop and Olive's "Flying Flag Service".

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