



A Balancing Act

By Mal Jacobs

As a service-orientated country we are in a unique position in that, generally speaking, we only experience bad service. Good service is what used to be, or what will be, but it sure ain't here now!

Which brings me to the 143 bus saga. All good, mature, patient, prospective travellers on this route will know what I mean. Within 20 minutes of living in the area I was informed by three people about the 143 as more than a myth.

Most of the horror stories I now know, including a few of my own.

A large number of senior citizens live in the area, particularly in East End Road, who are totally dependent on the 143 for medical appointments etc. All the excuses are used to cover a bad service, better known as a disservice to our community. We deserve better and we will get better.

Some of my experiences are:

- Frequent half-hour waits, several three-quarter-hour waits, several between one and one-and-a-quarter hour waits.
- Shoppers left at Tesco for two hours when buses were diverted
- Three occasions when half-full buses ignored signals and drove straight past
- Countdown sign went from 14 minutes to three minutes in a four-minute period
- Bus waited at East Finchley station, ignored the bus stop queue and drove off
- Wrong destination on front, customers had to leave bus

- halfway into journey
- Boxing Day, no buses at all
- Drivers not using lowering step

A Bus Guide to Read at the Bus Stop

- 1) Allow an extra half-hour (at least) for appointments
- 2) Don't read the timetable – it could cause you stress
- 3) Don't look at your wrist-watch
- 4) Don't give up, there is always the night bus
- 5) Always wear good walking shoes
- 6) If you have just missed one, don't worry – there is always tomorrow
- 7) If the Countdown isn't working properly, don't panic – it never is
- 8) If you thought it couldn't get worse, think again.
- 9) Don't speak quickly to anyone at the bus stop, there is plenty of time.
- 10) Take a book
- 11) What must be the worst service in London deserves a mention in the Guinness Book of Records.

Of course it isn't just the 143. *THE ARCHER* is inviting readers to form a 'Bus Action Group' that in future will monitor bus routes and represent users. For more information and contact details see 'THE ARCHER Bus Campaign' below.

THE ARCHER

Bus Campaign

By Daphne Chamberlain

Our local buses, particularly the 263, 143 and H3, have figured prominently in the columns of this paper during the last couple of years. If only they were a bit more prominent on the streets!

London Buses Customer Services have told me that the only way to improve services is to complain about them. Some of us have done this individually, but perhaps the time has come to form an organised action group.

For this to be effective, our complaints and comments must be detailed and specific, recording dates, times and circumstances. This campaign

is not just about regularity, but also about comfort, safety and convenience, and about recording appreciation where it is due. So – how do our buses affect your lives?

If you are interested in taking part, please contact *THE ARCHER*, by telephone voicemail/fax on 08717 33 44 65, by e-mailing the-archer@lineone.net, or by writing to POBox 3699, N2 8JA.

Russ's Corner

The late Russell Saczek was honoured at his favourite watering hole, Maddens, on 22 January this year. Russell, who passed away last autumn, (reported in the October 2002 edition of *THE ARCHER*) had regularly taken his position at the end of the bar in Maddens, which has now been formally recognised as 'Russ's Corner'.

Close friends joined Russ's partner Geraldine, and hosts Kieran and Margaret Madden, for an informal ceremony. Russ's close friend, Francis Coulson, made a brief speech, after Geraldine placed a plaque above the bar where Russell used to sit. Whilst emotions were running high, the ceremony was intimate and touching and sealed, needless to say, with one or two toasts. Russell may have physically left this world, but his presence at Maddens is now permanent.



Geraldine looks on as her partner Russ is honoured. Photo by Frank Tymkow.

There'll always be a spot for him in Madden's. Photo by Erini Rodis

Cats... and Dogs too

Cat Owners Roll Up - RSPCA Spring Offer

During March and April you have an opportunity to have your cats and kittens health-checked, then given a neutering voucher for the unbelievable price of £3 for males and £5 for females.

Bring your pet along to our clinic in Park Road (next door to the Duke of Cambridge) on

Monday or Thursday evenings between 6 and 7.30pm. Our vet will examine the cat then, all being well, you will receive your voucher to take to a local veterinary practice where an appointment for the operation to be carried out will be made.

This year we are extending our neutering scheme to include

dogs and puppies. They will be catered for during May - so, owners, keep your eyes open for details in the April *ARCHER*. Any queries, telephone 020 8444 8366.

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