



Retro bus rolls in to historic town ... and stays!

Matthew Thane chats about plans for the bus his family has owned and loved for thirty years

SHE'S A 1951 ANSAIR Flexible Clipper, American designed but 131 were built in Melbourne between 1950 and 1960. Some of these have been destroyed, wrecked or are just completely unrestorable. Forty have been rescued by enthusiasts like me. There are about 28 on the road at the moment.

There are many rallies throughout the year but the main event is held every Easter. Last April we had twelve Clippers (from all over Australia) meeting up to tour Tasmania for two weeks. We certainly attract attention especially when travelling in convoy. Most of the buses were restored to their original livery of the Pioneer and Ansett fleets.

Over the years owners have customised them to fit more with their own personalities and tastes. Painting

my bus red was the result of my first mid-life crisis . . . better than the sports car, receding hairline and polo neck jumper look!

The bus is now sixty-one years old and has been owned by the Thane family for thirty years. Originally blue and with a mini-moke mounted on the back it was a bit of a chugger with an old Leyland motor. Now, it is mechanically better than when it was built.

It is powered by a Detroit 2-stroke 6V53 turbo with supercharger and has an automatic Allison 4-speed gearbox with engine retarder for safety. Brakes, suspension, steering etc. have been upgraded to modern standards. The original log books from when it was in the Pioneer fleet shows records of 3.5 million miles, so the 400,000 kilometres we clocked up over the last thirty years seems like nothing. It currently gets four kilometres to the litre.

It was the perfect way to travel with children and the interior was gradually modified to accommodate their growth. It is a fully functional motorhome with all the mod-cons.

Travelling all over the country and for long periods of time was easy having TV/video to watch, food on hand, beds to sleep the hours away in and the ability to pull up and stay wherever we wanted.

It drew crowds everywhere which we enjoyed but sometimes it was overwhelming and our bus must be in thousands of photo albums around the world.

TICKETS PLEASE

Many of my friends' buses have been used in advertising media and movies. This particular bus has been in various Australian films and commercials notably the McDonalds 'Legends' series that featured James Dean and Marilyn Monroe lookalikes. Phillip Street in Sydney was closed off and facades were styled to resemble a 1950s streetscape. My scene in the bus took 30 takes, meaning I had to reverse the whole of Phillip Street that many times.

Over the years it was proudly shown off at school for show and tell. My favourite story here was the time the kids made snowballs at Perisher Valley and stored them in the freezer in the bus. Many months later, they took them to school to present to the class — snowballs in Byron Bay in Summer from the snowfield visit in Winter (well, by then they were just blocks of ice but that's not the point!). Harry and Hayley gained popularity when I made it available for school excursions and for the arrival vehicle at their formals. It was used for extra guest accommodation and sleepovers. The kids called it the fun bus, Mandy often referred to it as the expensive noise.

My bus and I now reside in Braidwood. As well as continuing to be used for travelling, I am setting it up as a wedding bus — to be used as the bridal vehicle and/or transfer from service to reception for guests. It will be available for hire from mid 2013.

For more information contact Matt by email: flexibleclipper@hotmail.com

Footnote: Our friend's Clipper, an extended version, was the going away vehicle at our wedding. Friends decorated it with streamers, balloons and a huge sign 'Just Married' and then . . . they all jumped on board and came with us! They dropped us at the airport and just kept carrying on. Yep, I think the kids are right — it is a fun bus.



ILLUSTRATION BY CATHERINE McDOUGALL.

A perilous retrieval

Mya Nipperess tells the tale

ISTOOD IN FRONT OF THE BIG IRON GATES staring up at the old haunted house. I took a deep breath before twisting the handle and pushing open the gates; they made a loud squeaking noise as they opened and welcomed me in. I walked quietly up the long thin path that led to the house, knowing I shouldn't be here.

There were rows of dead and uncared-for plants running up either side of the path. I made it to the house and crept over to the large wooden door. I reached up to open it, but before I had the chance, it opened on its own. A shiver ran up my spine as I thought of the possibility that someone had been watching and waiting for my arrival.

I started to have second thoughts about entering the old house, but I had to. If I didn't I would never get my hand ball back that my stupid sister threw in here last week. I finally plucked up all the courage I had and stepped inside.

There were big cobwebs covering the cracked walls and ceiling and a thick layer of dust covering the rotten floorboards. I took another step with a great fear that the floor would collapse underneath me and I would fall straight through and be lost forever.

I looked behind me and realized the place was so incredibly dusty that I could distinctly see my foot print on the floor behind me. I decided to head off down the corridor. There was a large room waiting for me at the end. As I entered I looked around and realized that it was once a ball room. There was a big grand piano in the corner of the room and a round wooden circle in the middle for dancing. A dusty chandelier hung by a rusty chain from the ceiling. I thought back to the 1800s when this house was built and

imagined what life would have been like for the people living here.

My thoughts were soon disrupted by a small sliver of light creeping in from underneath the door. I quickly spun around as I heard the door handle slowly start to turn. My mind started to race. My brain was telling me to run but my legs just couldn't. The handle suddenly stopped turning and the door clicked and swung open.

Standing in the light was a young woman. She was wearing a white silk night gown. Her face was pale and her eyes looked tired. I jumped back in fright and tripped over the edge of the carpet. As I landed a bomb of dust exploded into the air. I sat up rubbing my eyes. I opened them to find the figure standing over me. She reached out her hand as if hoping for me to reach up and grab hold of it, but I didn't. I just lay there staring up at her, unable to move.

Then a light bulb switched on in my brain as I remembered who this figure must be; Adelaide Orr-Deas. She was the ghost who is said to have haunted this place. In 1827 she was found dead right here in this room. My heart started to beat fast. I looked up at the left side of her chest and sure enough there was the knife wound that had killed her hundreds of years ago.

I quickly jumped up and ran; down the corridor and straight out the front door, down the gravel path and out through the big iron gates. I collapsed on the road gasping for breath. That was certainly the most frightening moment of my life.

I woke startled. Cold beads of sweat were dripping down my face. Oh, it was only a dream! A big wave of relief washed over me. I threw off my blanket and jumped out of bed. I walked over to the window and opened it; a cool breeze swept in. I stared up at the old house on the hill at the edge of town.

A figure drifted to the window. There was a knife wound in the left side of her chest and in her right hand she was holding something up, a small yellow ball. My handball!

This wasn't a dream at all.



MATTHEW THANE