



1. The team from Anthony's Travel, 2011 Coach Operator of the Year; 2. Chris Wales, CTC chief exec, presented Blenheim Palace with coach friendly attraction award; 3. Carol Peters scooped Coach Operator of the Year (small fleets); 4. Johnsons Coach & Bus won Coach Operator of the Year (large fleets); 5. Brighton & Hove won the coach marketing award; 6. First Rail Support's Sahid Ullah was an Unsung Hero; 7. Encore was recognised as best service provider (ticketing); 8. Bury market was the most coach-friendly shopping attraction.

Celebrating coaching excellence

Coach & Bus Week's joint deputy editor Gareth Evans reports on the third annual UK Coach Awards – which celebrated and rewarded the very best the industry has to offer in Manchester last week

The air was full of friendly competitive spirit. Sweepstakes were organised by attendees on some tables – while the likely winners became the subject of much debate. That said the UKCA remains a civilised affair. The organisation is slick, it's impressive and one feels proud to be there and be part of it – but perhaps more importantly, and at the risk of apparent contradiction, it's a friendly, down to earth event. Lounge suits are very much in vogue here.

There may have been rivalry but it was all in good spirit – more friends reunited than blitzkrieg. Indeed, there was almost pantomime-like participation from the audience – with much good natured cheering and booing.

What's more, the positive air made a pleasant change from the dark sky currently hanging over much of the wider PCV industry and indeed, society as a whole. While it would be easy for cynics to dismiss such positivity as merely being the result one of the awards'

raisons d'être, the UKCA differs from other such schemes in that it mixes the integral ingredients of coach tourism – passengers, local authorities, industry suppliers, drivers, operators – and attractions. The latter is an industry in itself yet one which would arguably be lost without the coach industry. Thus, the UKCA is more than a mere operator's event. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that tourism views coaches as a major part of the solution to the economic downturn and hence is keen to support and engage with the coach industry.

Back to the awards evening, over 60 individuals, companies and organisations across the UK coach and coach tourism industry were recognised and rewarded for their excellence and good practice at the Belmont International UK Coach Awards, which took place on Thursday (April 7) at Manchester's famous Ramada Jarvis Piccadilly Hotel, which literally towers over the city centre.

Amongst the prize winners were coach operators and coach drivers who were nominated by group travel organisers and other industry

customers from around the country. Crowned UK Operator of the Year was Cheshire family coach operator Anthony's Travel – who also won the Coach Operator of the Year (Medium Fleets) title. The judgement was based both on customer nominations, performance data and a 'mystery shopper' exercise to test the company's customer friendliness.

Giving his reaction to the news, Richard Bamber of Anthony's Travel said: "We're humbly overwhelmed. We didn't expect in our wildest dreams to win once let alone twice. It's an honour to be shortlisted in itself.

"For me personally this is a great fortieth birthday present. My dad Tony has had to put up an extra shelf so visitors to our premises can see our awards. It's a great feeling. We're proud to be involved with the UK Coach Awards – that's why we brought a large number of our team along."

The Coach Operator of the Year (Large Fleets) title went to Warwickshire family-run business Johnson's Coach and Bus, for the second year in a row, in

About the UKCA:

The UK Coach Awards (UKCA) is run by an independent not for profit joint venture company established by Rouncy Media, publishers of 'Coach and Bus Week' and 'Group Travel and Coach World' magazines, and Transport Events Group, the company that organises the hugely successful UK Bus Awards, now in their sixteenth successful year. The company delegates the organisation of the scheme to a Management Committee comprising representatives of industry stakeholders and customer representatives.

For more information, including more photographs from the awards ceremony, go to the website www.ukcoachawards.co.uk





1. Gretna Green's Blacksmith's Shop won Coach Friendly Tourist Attraction; 2. Golden Boy's Colin Morton was named top driver; 3. Door2Tour.com was Best Industry Support Solution; 4. Rouncy Media chairman Jonathan Taylor (middle), with Jackie Taylor (Pontins) & Mike Woods (Fastnet Line); 5. Park Inn won Best Service Provider (hotels); 6. David Roberts, Oswaldtwistle Mills', was another Unsung Hero 7. Mike Beagrie accepted Evobus' Coach of the year award

a competition for over 50 vehicles. Coach Operator of the Year for Small Fleets was named as Carol Peters Travel, a firm from Ramsgate in Kent established a decade ago.

The Coach Driver of the Year was named as Colin Morton, who has worked for the Hertfordshire coach operator Golden Boy Coaches for over 30 years, and where his skill and professionalism ensure that he's in heavy demand from the company's regular customers.

The best practice in coach friendliness categories have been designed to highlight best practice amongst local authorities, tourist attractions, shopping attractions and service providers in welcoming coaches, their passengers and their drivers to venues all over the country.

Top tourist attraction was the Blacksmith's Shop at Gretna Green, with the West Midland Safari & Leisure Park named runner up for the second year in a row. In a similar contest for historic attractions, top prize went to Blenheim Palace, with Black Country Living Museum as runner up.

Medway Council was named Most Coach Friendly Local Authority, recognising its outstanding service at Rochester and Chatham, with Cheshire West and Chester as runners up. The shopping attraction that was most coach friendly was named as Bury Market, with Boundary Mill Stores scooping the runners up prize.

There were prizes too for professionalism in specific aspects of coach operation and management, for coach builders and for providers of support solutions such as software and engineering support. The Setra S416GT-HD was named Coach of the Year for the third year in a row, whilst the award for Best Industry Support Solution went to an innovative internet marketing portal, Door2Tour.com.

The award for Coach Marketing went to Go-Ahead Group subsidiary Brighton & Hove Bus and Coach Company, for its campaign to promote its coach fleet and excursions programme, whilst fellow subsidiary Go South Coast was named as runner up.

Several people were also

honoured for their hard work in supporting the industry. "Our aim is to recognise the hard work, dedication and professionalism of a whole range of people and organisations involved in coach tourism around the country," explained UKCA director Chris Cheek. The professionals recognised with awards on the night were Shahid Ullah of First Rail Support, Mary Sewell of Medway Council and David Roberts of Oswaldtwistle Mills, all named 'Unsung Heroes', whilst Chris Wales, chief executive of the Coach Tourism Council, was given the prestigious award for services to the Coach Industry. He has worked in the industry all his life, and was a founder member of CTC in 1988, going on to be chairman too. He has been chief executive since 2004.

"The judges were really impressed," said Chris. "There's some really clever thinking and innovation going on all over the country - delivering what matters: better products and better trips for our customers. Whether it's using the internet and other new media or just thinking things through,

people really are working very hard, and thoroughly deserve the recognition that the UK Coach Awards delivered on Thursday night."

In his closing remarks, Chris said: "One of the paradoxes about the bus and coach industry is that most people see it as a technology-driven business. After all, our biggest physical presence are all those chunky bits of hardware that we send out onto the roads every day.

"In fact, though, we are actually a people-based industry. That's why over 60% of our costs go in paying wages, social security and pension contributions. Whether it's driving the coaches, cleaning and maintaining them, planning and marketing the services or managing and supervising - it's our people on whom we rely. "And it's our customers who pay our wages. In coaching particularly, so much of the work is in the leisure industry - where so often our competition is just staying at home and pottering about in the garden. We have to deliver!"

"I'm delighted therefore to add my congratulations to the winners of this year's awards and indeed to

all today's finalists."

The awards evening was compered by BBC Breakfast's Carol Kirkwood and the awards themselves were presented by ever-enthusiastic, knowledgeable and respected Steve Whiteway, president of the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) for the second year running. The event was attended by over 250 key players in the coaching and coach tourism industry - a 20% increase on last year.

The raffle raised over £1,300 for the Transaid charity. Founded by the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport and Save the Children, the international UK development charity aims to reduce poverty and improve livelihoods across Africa and the developing world through creating better transport.

The awards were also further boosted this year by the support from Volvo, who attended for the first time. They were joined by other well-known coach industry suppliers, including Evobus UK, Plaxton, Michelin, Belmont, Aviva, Ramada Jarvis, English Heritage, Bury Markets and The Rezidor Hotel Group. ☐

The Winners:

COACH OPERATOR OF THE YEAR

Small Fleets, fewer than 15 vehicles

WINNER: Carol Peters Coach Travel, Ramsgate, Kent

RUNNER UP: Grahams Coaches, Colchester, Essex

Medium Fleets, 16-50 vehicles

WINNER: Anthony's Travel, Runcorn, Cheshire

RUNNER UP: Excelsior Coaches, Bournemouth, Dorset

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Cozy Tours, Letchworth, Hertfordshire; Golden Boy Coaches, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire; Marshall's Coaches, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire; Maynes Coaches of Buckie, Moray

Large Fleets, over 50 vehicles

WINNER: Johnsons Coach and Bus Travel, Henley-in-Arden, Warwickshire

RUNNER UP: Bowen Coaches, Tamworth, Staffordshire

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Shearings, Wigan, Lancashire

UK Coach Operator of the Year

WINNER: Anthony's Travel, Runcorn, Cheshire

RUNNER UP: Johnsons Coach and Bus Travel, Henley-in-Arden, Warwickshire

COACH DRIVER OF THE YEAR AWARD

WINNER: Colin Morton, Golden Boy Coaches, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire

RUNNER UP: Nigel Isom, Cozy Tours, Letchworth, Hertfordshire

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Mike Fitzgerald, Anthony's Travel, Runcorn, Cheshire; Les Edwards, Cozy Tours, Letchworth, Herts; Ken Jones, Anthony's Travel, Runcorn, Cheshire; Scott Ritchie, Maynes Coaches, Buckie, Moray

INDUSTRY SUPPORT SOLUTION OF THE YEAR

Designed to recognise and reward excellence and high standards in the delivery of essential support services to coach operators.

WINNER: Door2Tour.com, Larkfield, Kent

RUNNER UP: Gauntlet Risk Management, Leeds

HIGHLY COMMENDED: David Allen Chartered Accountants, Carlisle, Cumbria; Distinctive Systems, York

COACH OF THE YEAR AWARD

Operators were asked to nominate the best vehicles from the passenger perspective.

WINNER: Setra 416GTHD (Evobus (UK) Limited, Coventry)

RUNNER UP: Volvo/Plaxton BR9 Elite (Plaxton Limited, Scarborough)

HIGHLY COMMENDED:

Neoplan Tourliner (Neoman UK Limited, Swindon)

MOST COACH FRIENDLY LOCAL AUTHORITY

Operators were asked to nominate authorities that had made extra effort to deliver outstanding facilities for coaches and their passengers.

WINNER: Medway Council

RUNNER UP: Cheshire West and Chester Council

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Bury Metropolitan Borough Council; Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead

MOST COACH FRIENDLY HISTORIC ATTRACTION

Historic attractions that have gone 'that extra mile' to accommodate, attract, and welcome coaches, their drivers and their passengers.

WINNER: Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, Oxfordshire

RUNNER UP: Black Country Living Museum, Dudley, West Midlands

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Chatsworth, Derbyshire; Warwick Castle, Warwick

MOST COACH FRIENDLY TOURIST ATTRACTION

Tourist attractions that have gone 'that extra mile' to accommodate, attract, and welcome coaches, their drivers and their passengers.

WINNER: Gretna Green Blacksmith's Shop, Dumfries & Galloway

RUNNER UP: West Midland Safari Park, Bewdley, Worcestershire

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Eden Project, Bodelva, Cornwall; Drayton Manor, Tamworth, Staffordshire; Royal Yacht Britannia, Leith, Edinburgh

MOST COACH FRIENDLY SHOPPING ATTRACTION

Shopping attractions that have gone 'that extra mile' to accommodate, attract, and welcome coaches, their drivers and their passengers.

WINNER: Bury Market, Gtr Manchester

RUNNER UP: Boundary Mill Stores, Colne, Lancashire

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Bicester Shopping Village, Oxfordshire; Oswaldtwistle Mills Shopping Village, Lancashire; The Trafford Centre, Greater Manchester

BEST SERVICE SUPPLIER

Providers of services such as meals, hotels, admission tickets or sea crossings that have made outstanding efforts to accommodate, attract, and welcome coaches, their

drivers and their passengers

WINNER: Rezidor - Park Inns

RUNNER UP: Road Chef

JUDGES' SPECIAL COMMENDATION: Blunsdon House Hotel, Swindon

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Warner Leisure Hotels

SEA CROSSING/WATER TRANSPORT

WINNER: Wightlink

RUNNER UP: Stena Line

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Eurotunnel; P&O Ferries

THEATRE & VENUE TICKETING

WINNER: Encore Ticketing, London

RUNNER UP: Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Group Line, London

TOUR WHOLESALING

WINNER: Greatdays Travel Group, Altrincham, Cheshire

RUNNER UP: Action Tours, Shifnal, Shropshire

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Albatross Tours, Larkfield, Kent

COACH MARKETING AWARD

This goes to the company judged to have made the best and most creative use of a range of marketing tools to grow their business and increase consumer awareness.

WINNER: Putting the Coach into Brighton & Hove, Brighton & Hove

RUNNER UP: Bus and Coach Company

RUNNER UP: Stylish Coach Hire, Go South Coast

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Nation Expects, National Express

UNsung HEROES

This award is designed to recognise and reward the hard work, loyalty and devotion to duty of one or more individuals who perform junior or middle management roles in the industry.

THREE PRIZES ARE AWARDED:

■ Shahid Ullah, First Rail Support

■ David Roberts, Oswaldtwistle Mill

■ Mary Sewell, Medway Council

SERVICES TO THE INDUSTRY

This prize is awarded to somebody in the world of coach tourism who has devoted a lifetime to the industry, and delivered exceptional service in the provision and/or delivery of coach services. This year, the prize goes to Christopher Wales of the Coach Tourism Council.