

## FINANCE MATTERS

In association with HSBC Equipment Finance

# Choosing the right asset finance provider

*In the current financial climate how do you select the best solution for your business?* Chris Bowden offers some tips

Asset Finance providers broadly fall into three camps: the specialist niche providers, those tied to manufacturers and the instalment credit and leasing arms of the major UK high street banks. So there is much choice out there for businesses.

As with many UK businesses those in the asset finance market have been affected by the credit crunch with some experiencing difficulty in accessing capital to lend to customers. In this environment it's all the more important to choose the right asset finance provider for your business. Here are some hints and tips:

### ■ Choose one that understands your business:

It sounds obvious but it's important to choose an asset finance provider that understands your business. Price is important but you should consider what the asset finance provider knows about the bus and coach sector. One that understands your market, your customers and your business will be able to offer an appropriate financial solution.

### ■ Look for stability:

In the current economic climate you need to assure yourself that your chosen asset finance provider has the structure and strength to continue to offer you competitively priced finance products over the long term.

### ■ Choose one that understands the assets you are funding:

A finance provider who understands the difference between a midi coach and an executive coach will have a greater appreciation of the assets they are funding and will be able to provide you with the



Chris Bowden, Head of Commercial Vehicle Finance at HSBC Equipment Finance Ltd

product that meets your needs.

### ■ Choose one that understands the market:

In a sector which is fluid through legislative and tax changes it's important that your funder keeps abreast of these changes in order to offer you the most competitive and appropriate solution.

### ■ Choose one that values the relationship with your business:

What does your asset finance provider do to show they value the relationship with your business? Do they maintain regular contact with you? Have they visited you at your business' premises? Do they keep up to date on who's winning which contracts? Do they know the major manufacturers and suppliers in the industry?

If you have any questions or queries on this article or any aspect of asset finance then please contact Chris Bowden on: [christopherbowden@hsbc.com](mailto:christopherbowden@hsbc.com)

Or visit: [www.hsbc.co.uk/coach](http://www.hsbc.co.uk/coach)

## NEWS

# Smiths of Ledbury re-launches

*Revitalised operation buys pair of new Plaxton Profile to kick-start business*

By Andy Izatt

Smiths Motors of Ledbury, Herefordshire has re-launched as a corporate and private hire business after investing in a pair of Plaxton Profile-bodied Volvo B7Rs.

Managing Director Mike Sterry chose the coaches as the core element of the revitalised operation. "The Plaxton Profile is the ideal vehicle to meet our new business needs," he says. "We identified that there was lots of call from customers old and new for 57-seaters.

"We have found that offering three-point seatbelts is a major influence on private hire customers returning to us and they have been very pleased with what we have to offer them in the Profiles."

Smiths Motors was formed by Mike's father in the early 1960s,



Volo B7R Profiles are core of new business

based on a corner site next to the family home near Ledbury railway station, a location still in use today.

The company grew to operate around five vehicles on contracts and private hire, regularly choosing Plaxton coachwork including that on their first new vehicle delivered in 1972. Control of the company later passed to Mike who introduced a third generation of the Sterry family to the business when daughter Claire

became Company Secretary.

In late 2008, Mike decided to retire handing back the company's remaining contracts, but the change in his life was not to his liking and after six weeks, the business was re-launched, again in conjunction with Claire.

Three full-sized coaches and a midicoach are currently operated with the new vehicles proving popular in attracting back previous clientele.

## Central launches new route



Cllr Gary Clarke (l) launches the S1 with Central Buses' Geoff Cross

Central Buses starts commercial half-hourly Sutton Coldfield-Erdington route S1 on Monday (27 April), replacing Centro tendered hourly service 118 and commercial 196.

The new route serves Mere Green, Streetly, Hundred Acre, Kingstanding, New Oscott and Wylde Green. A refurbished Optare Solo and two low-floor Darts with CCTV and flat screen monitors displaying local news and information are being used.

Central Buses MD Geoff Cross says: "The improvements have been made in response to public demand and we trust that passengers will

benefit with the longer hours of operation and a more frequent service. The new service offers new transport links without the requirement for passengers having to change buses to get to their destination."

It also means Centro will not have to subsidise as many services along the route. Cllr Gary Clarke, Chairman of Centro and Conservative councillor for Streetly says: "We welcome this move by Central Buses. Not only will it reduce the cost on the public purse, but it will also bring major benefits for passengers and should help attract more people onto public transport."

## 'Support UK bus builders' call by Cable

Vince Cable MP has called on the government to use taxpayers' money to buy British-built buses.

It follows the Liberal Democrat Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer's visit to Alexander Dennis' Guildford factory last week.

Talking about Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling handling of the Credit Crunch he says: "What can the Government do in the Budget to help avert an

unemployment crisis? It would be better to redirect the remaining £8.5 billion set aside to public works projects.

"Public transport is a top priority. Instead of the Government's proposal to use taxpayers' money to bribe motorists to buy a new car - 85% of which are imported - surely it would make much more sense to order new, better, British-made buses to ease congestion?"

## Oxford left £600,000 out of pocket after ruling

Oxford City Council's Deputy Leader Ed Turner has called for an "urgent meeting" with Transport Minister Paul Clark after a concessionary fare reimbursement ruling that Cllr Turner describes as an "absolute disgrace."

The council now has to pay a further £600,000 for reimbursement in 2008/9 after Stagecoach Oxford and Go-Ahead's Oxford Bus Company won an

appeal against the council.

The adjudicator ruled that the reimbursement rate should be raised and the average fare used in the formula should include trips crossing the city boundary.

The council says reimbursement will now cost it £3.8m in 2008/9, up from £1.7m in 2007/8. It only received £821,000 from the Government for the 2008/9 scheme.

# Technology to lead the way

Launched at last October's Euro Bus Expo, the new-look Technology Zone will feature right at the heart of Coach & Bus Live taking place at Birmingham's NEC on 7 and 8 October.

Show Director Mark Griffin says: "Re-branding Transport Innovations as we have and integrating it within Coach & Bus Live is much more than a simple re-naming and re-jigging the floor plan exercise.

"This is a strategically led move, one that reflects the increasingly pivotal role technology plays within the professional lives of bus and coach operators."

One of the main features at this year's Coach & Bus Live, the Technology Zone is specifically targeted at a cross section of visitors from local authorities, operating and technology based companies, passenger transport and regulatory authorities.

It will highlight the many different ways these groups can benefit and improve their passenger transport services with the aid of the new processes and systems on display.

This dedicated zone is a reflection of trends within the marketplace and, in particular, the acceleration of new technologies. Explains Mr Griffin: "The current growth in



Two-day technology focus

demand for public transport has given rise to a special focus on systems delivering high quality passenger transport information. The Technology Zone aims to capture these developments by showcasing the huge variety of travel information products and services now available from on street electronic kiosks and real-time journey mapping to the very latest in mobile devices and backroom software."

As an additional attraction for this year's show, the organisers will be running two daily technology-based seminars.

● With floor space for the Technology Zone and Coach & Bus Live selling quickly, companies who are interested in exhibiting but who have yet to make a booking are urged to act promptly and avoid disappointment. To book a stand call 01926 833052 or visit [www.coachandbuslive.com](http://www.coachandbuslive.com)

The first of Shearings ground-breaking order for 45 Setras is in the country. Exhibited within the depleted trade area at last weekend's UK Coach

Rally in Brighton, one of 30 S416 GT-HDs showed the shape of things to come for the Wigan-based coach tour operator's fleet. In addition the order with EvoBus calls for 15 S415 GT-HDs in National Holidays livery with 53-seats. The coach on display is one of 10 S416 GT-HDs built to a new Grand Tourer specification.

