

OVER 100 TSUNAMI BUSES SHIPPED FROM SOUTHAMPTON

The British and Irish bus industry has finalised its response to the Boxing Day tsunami disaster in Indonesia and Sri Lanka by shipping out 100 'mid-life' buses. They were donated to Islamic Relief by Asia Bus Response, coordinated by Mitch de Faria of The Event Makers, organiser of the UK Bus Awards.

A wide range of bus types has been shipped out to the region; although they were donated free of charge, there were shipping costs of £500,000 to be met and governments in the area had to be persuaded to waive the import duty payable on imported buses. They are a mix of double-deckers, single-deckers, coaches and smaller vehicles, some of which will be used for schools transport and some as mobile classrooms, enabling local children to resume their disrupted education. Because the vehicles will be running low mileages it is hoped they will be able to serve for 10 years, despite their age.

The requirement was for serviceable, high-floor mid-life types, though many are rather older than might be understood by the term



Above: Three of the ex-Oxford Darts blow up a dust storm as they roll into Marwell Zoo. **ANDREW DUNSMORE/PICTURE PARTNERSHIP**

'mid-life'. This has resulted in some rugged types, capable of good service in difficult conditions, like five Ulsterbus Leyland Leopards.

Apart from a Fleetline from Thamesdown and a one-time Lothian Atlantean, which had already been in use as a playbus, the double-deckers are all Metrobuses — a type considered more rugged and more easily repaired than most recent double-deckers. Nine of these were genuinely mid-life vehicles from First, on D to G plates, including G107 FJW, which was built for West Midlands Travel but used by Optare when it took over the rights to the Metrobus.

Travel West Midlands also donated six Metrobuses, Trent sent four MAN-based Optare Vectas, including two from Kinchbus. Southern Vectis sent several Iveco

minibuses, including its 'Pink Peril' and Oxford Bus Company sent four of its rather unloved Marshall-bodied Darts, which seem to have been rather itinerant vehicles for some time.

Other interesting vehicles included an Ipswich Buses Leyland B21 and, perhaps most unexpected, Cronin's Coaches of Cork sent an unusual Hino coach.

All 100 buses were checked over and cleaned by Solent Blue Line before shipping and gathered at Marwell Zoo near Winchester ready for their final journey to Southampton Docks.

■ report and most pictures by **STEPHEN MORRIS**



Left: The rare Japanese-built Hino donated by Cronin's of Cork.

Below: The ex-Lothian Atlantean destined to become a mobile classroom.



Below: The Metrobuses included First Manchester 30293 (D310 JVR), with Northern Counties body.

