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Gladiator light-man on demand bus

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It’s not every day you meet an Emmy award winner on a bus in rural Surrey. And it’s not every day the said Emmy award winner would be driving that bus either. But that’s what passengers in the north of Mole Valley may find if they book one of the on-demand, electric buses that have been running in the area since last year.

Tim Hall worked in TV for 40 years, including on the iconic **Gladiators** early in his career, and told the LDRS he took home Emmys for his work as a lighting director on Olympic ceremonies in Russia and Rio. Having done his last job in early 2022, he found himself in retirement, at the end of his working life and thinking: “Is this it?” He came out of retirement to drive the buses, which launched in June last year.

The LDRS* took a trip on the bus, where passengers, both regular and new, praised the service for being reliable and good value, and for the care and attention shown by the drivers as well.

*(Epsom and Ewell Times news partner the BBC Local Democracy Reporting Service)

As well as more than £600,000 of central government funding for better rural transport links in Surrey, the county council has put in more than £200,000 to the Mole Valley service, and hopes to expand the scheme further. Tim admitted there is often a lot of chat to be had on the buses. “You can start a conversation off and before you know it you have been excluded from it,” he said.

The buses can be booked on an app, via a website or on the phone, and have no fixed route. Would-be passengers can check the availability at the time they want to travel, and can book in advance or on the day, a minimum of half an hour ahead. The service is also part of the capped bus fares scheme, meaning that until the end of March all journeys will cost £2, though those over five miles would normally cost £3.

Mother and daughter Beryl and Alison Wood had booked the bus from Cobham Sainsbury’s, one of the extra places passengers can travel to outside of the designated area, back to Beryl’s Bookham home with their shopping. It was Beryl’s first time using the service, which she described as “wonderful” but Alison said she uses the bus a few times a month, whether for visiting her mum or for other reasons.

Alison said the drivers always made sure passengers got on and off safely, including helping with their shopping, which was particularly important for elderly people or those who are less mobile. She added: “You feel like you’re being taken care of. [The drivers make] sure that you’re out of the bus safely.”

Other out-of-area stops that passengers can travel to include Effingham Junction station and the Dorking stations, as well as Cobham’s Waitrose and Epsom hospital. Tim said the bus was very important to the people who use it, especially for those with reduced mobility as well as those using wheelchairs or other aids to get around. He added: “[Walking] more than 100 yards is too much for them. This is great. We pull up right outside their front door.”

[Ed: Do you think Epsom and Ewell needs these on-demand bus services? Let us know at admin@epsomandewelltimes.com.]

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