

Double-decker driver:

"We're gonna make a star outa you, son, but you have to take your sunglasses off."

By **KAREN MILLERS**
Staff Writer

A hopeful hitchhiker holds his thumb out to the traffic southbound for Florida. He stares curiously at an almost empty double-deck bus lumbering toward him at 45 miles per hour. His curiosity changes to disbelief when the bus pulls off the road. Jerry Miller opens the bus door and calls out from his noisy cab. "I go slow, but I've got plenty of room."

Miller, who now drives the Villages' bus, made that offer quite often in the year and a half he spent delivering double-deck buses from British Promotions of Norfolk, Va., to their new owners across the country. He logged over 30,000 miles criss-crossing the nation in the 13- to 14-foot high double-deckers, seeing the scenery and meeting people.

"I had a dozen people (hitchhikers) once," Miller said. "Somebody had a down sleeping bag, and it broke. I had to deliver the buses clean, so it took me and two others about four hours to clean it up."

Miller still meets people on the bus he drives, but the riders on the Villages' red double-decker in Chapel Hill are usually regular passengers rather than travelers hitching a ride.

"I actually fell into driving buses by accident," he said. "I got out of the Navy in Norfolk and responded to an ad requesting someone to deliver double-deck buses for British Promotions. . . . I was looking for a job, and there were not too many available, so I took it."

Miller's training was 15 minutes of practice in a parking lot. Then he made his first delivery, from Norfolk to Pittsburgh, Penn.

"I got to do some traveling at somebody else's expense — it was great," he said. I liked seeing the country the best." And he did see a lot of country — California, Colorado, Kansas, Florida, New York and all points between those states and Norfolk.

Wherever he went, he was certain to arouse curiosity and draw stares. A short, two-decker bus simply is not a common sight in the United States. An average of only two exist in every state.

Miller and his buses often ignited quite an interest in the towns he passed through. A newspaper reporter or television cameraman usually found him before he left the area. One Texas television reporter told him, "We're gonna make a star outa you, son! But you'll have to take your sunglasses off."

Townpeople were not the only ones fascinated by the buses. Police in several states pulled him, usually to check his overheight permit.

"Most of the time when police stopped me they were just curious," Miller said. "Once in Pennsylvania a trooper followed me for 45 minutes, flipping through his manual trying to find something to stop me for. He finally pulled me."

The trooper ticketed him for overheight by classifying his vehicle a bus instead of a truck, as it is usually classified on the highway. Buses running outside of towns in Pennsylvania must not be over 10 feet high. Other states, such as Virginia and Illinois, have strict overheight regulations. But often Miller avoided problems because the buses moved under British tags and had 60 days to be moved from the port of entry to the place of licensing.

"It was almost like operating outside the law because there wasn't anything specifically to cover them," he said.

Miller learned to slide his tall buses under the low overpasses that concerned police by letting them idle under at about three or four miles per hour. He never wrecked one that way himself, but once a goggling motorist watching him slip under an overpass rammied into the back end of the car ahead of him.

Sometimes the overpasses were entirely too low, as in Buffalo, N.Y., where a railroad rings the city and caps nearly every entering road with a low overpass.

"It took me 45 minutes to get into Buffalo," Miller said. "I bet that bus is still somewhere inside the city."

Miller drove for British Promotions until January 1974, making an average of two deliveries each month. Then the fuel crisis hit, and people stopped buying the buses. He had had a job earlier from the North Carolina Museum of Life and Sciences in Durham, so he checked to see if it was still good and then moved to North Carolina. His job was to transport schoolchildren to the museum.

In July 1975, the Villages apartments advertised for a double-deck bus driver, preferably with experience. "Since I had driven them over 30,000 miles, I figured I was the most experienced person in North Carolina," he said.

Since then Miller has been making daily runs ferrying students from the Villages to campus and back — a big switch from cross-country traveling.

"In some ways it's dull, and at other times it's interesting," he said. "The route itself is the same, but the people are different. . . . You get almost a whole new group of people at the Villages every year."

Miller said he wants to do something different eventually — something other than driving a bus.

"I like Chapel Hill, but I won't be here forever," he said. "It's funny how you just fall into something, and it almost becomes a way of life. I'd like to go out on the road again — but not on a bus."



After four years and many, many miles, Jerry Miller has settled into the routine of carting students from the Villages to the campus and back — a far cry from the days when he used to transport the big double-deckers across country.

INTERNATIONAL RUGBY UNC vs BRISTOL

Fetzer Field
4.30 Friday



SHONEY'S

Tar Heel Crispy Chicken

It's a Football Game Winner!

Get an 8 piece box, 14 piece picnic
or 20 piece feast for

10% off!

(9/15-20, take out only)

Call 929-2115 for orders

Remember Shoney's Friday Fish Fry —
All the Fish You Can Eat for \$2.29

Open 6 a.m. - 12 midnight Mon. - Wed.; Thurs. & Fri., 6 a.m. - 3 a.m.;
Sat. 7 a.m. - 3 a.m., Sun. 8 a.m. - 12 midnight

W. Franklin St. across from Granville Towers

Smart Readers
See & Clip
Coupons
From the Tar Heel

"Scene after scene is unforgettable."
— Penelope Gilliatt, New Yorker Magazine

2:35
4:50
7:05
9:20

Carolina Twin
English Subtitles
PG

Cria!

SPECIAL LIMITED ENGAGEMENT

ROCKY
Academy Award Winner
"BEST PICTURE OF THE YEAR!"
starring Sylvester Stallone

2:30
6:45
7:00
9:15
Last Day Thurs.

3 Women
Shelley Duvall Sissy Spacek Jane Fonda

Friday
Sept. 16

PHONE 967-4737
Plaza 1
ELIOT RD. AT E. FRANKLIN

HELD OVER
SORRY — NO
PASSES

SHOWS
2:20
4:45
7:10
9:35

ROGER MOORE
JAMES BOND
007 in
"THE SPY WHO LOVED ME" PG

PHONE 967-4737
Plaza 2
ELIOT RD. AT E. FRANKLIN

STARTS
TOMORROW

SHOWS
2:20
4:10
6:00
7:50
9:40

WHAT THE PRINCE SLIPPED CINDERELLA WAS NOT A SLIPPER.

Cinderella

PHONE 967-4737
Plaza 3
ELIOT RD. AT E. FRANKLIN

STARTS
TOMORROW

SHOWS
4:15
6:45
9:15

Emanuel L. Wallf presents
the John Huston-John Foreman film
The Man Who Would Be King
An Allied Artists
Columbia Pictures Production
An Allied Artists Release PG

PHONE 967-3651
Varsity
121 E. FRANKLIN ST.

HELD OVER
12th BIG WEEK
SORRY — NO
PASSES

SHOWS
2:30
4:45
7:00
9:15

A long time ago
in a galaxy far
far away.

STAR WARS PG-13

CHEAPER RECORDS!

★★★ 25¢ to \$1.00 ★★★
Originally advertised prices cut in half (!)
on our deletions and overruns clearance!

If you thought 49¢ to \$1.99 was cheap. . .
hurry back to

108 Henderson Street
12 noon to 9 pm

Friday and Saturday,
September 16 and 17 only

"There's still some good stuff left. And with records as low as 25¢ how can you lose?"

(Remember, cash only. All sales final.)

Record Bar