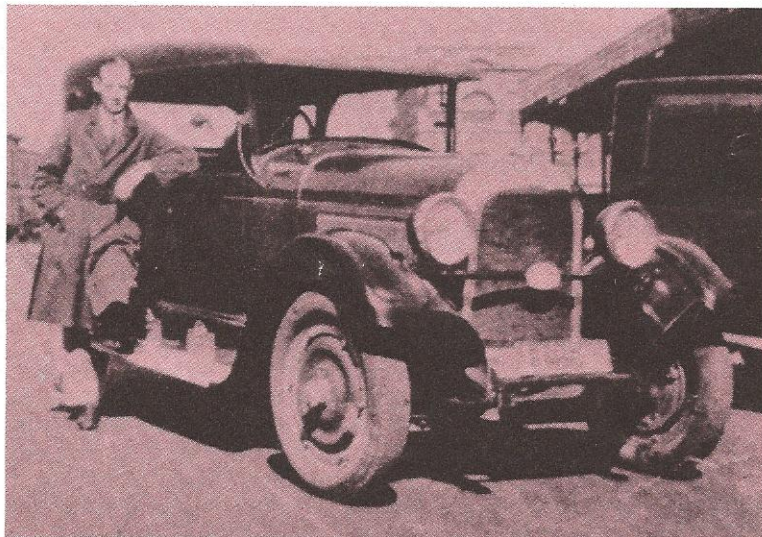


Australia's Oldest Coach Company, with



Mr. R. M. (now Sir Reginald) Ansett standing alongside his Studebaker Duplex five passenger vehicle. The photograph was taken in Ballarat in 1930. The service operated by Sir Reginald was a Maryborough to Ballarat daily return.

PIONEER HISTORY

No company could ever have been more aptly named than Pioneer Coaches.

From the time it began as a one-vehicle operation in 1905, it has blazed a trail of coach routes across Australia, and introduced features and innovations which have revolutionised coach travel.

In the early days of Pioneer, the operators were all but explorers.

Pioneer had, for example, three-week tours operating between Melbourne and Sydney, before either New South Wales or Victoria had an authority in charge of roads.

The Australian Alps, with an ill-defined, virtually unknown route, was first opened to coach tours by Pioneer.

In 1927, Pioneer undertook a trans-continental trip from Melbourne to Darwin — and seven years later Pioneering tourists went right around Australia.

This was the Pioneer, led first by Mr. A. A. Withers and later by his son, Percy, that did the trailblazing.

The Pioneer led by R. M. (now Sir Reginald) Ansett did trailblazing of a different kind after World War II — the first development of layback seats;

first production line coaches; coach-captains totally trained, even by using psychologists, instead of being just bus drivers; "preventive maintenance" of vehicles; and so on.

But it continued to trailblaze new routes. Post-war Pioneer, for example, virtually developed Alice Springs and surrounding area as a tourist centre, even to the extent — and expense — of road-building.

And today, Ansett Pioneer still leads the way with the introduction of luxury coaches.

THE BEGINNING

It's hard to believe that all this was begun in 1905 by a farmer with a vision.

The history of the company — the story of a man and a company which refused to be beaten by nature and the harsh geography of Australia — reads at times like the pages of a schoolboy's adventure annual.

But it is a history of which the men working for Pioneer today are justifiably proud.

Determinedly, with great foresight and excellent planning, the company's founder, Mr. A. A. Withers, expanded his firm from a one-vehicle operation in 1905 to a multi-vehicle company which forged mile after mile of bus routes.

In a 20-year period, from

1919 to 1941, the company vastly expanded its passenger transport network until it gradually linked every east coast capital city as well as many inland country towns. The routes spread out to cover thousands of miles.

Yet when Mr. A. A. Withers operated the first motor vehicle for hire in Melbourne, the venture met with mixed success. Although a popular innovation, the vehicle was plagued by mechanical trouble.

Undaunted, he pressed on, and in 1913 a White vehicle was purchased, which enabled him to expand his service from half-day trips around Melbourne to include whole-day trips to Warburton and Flinders.

Business continued to improve to such an extent that by 1914 Mr. A. A. Withers the farmer turned coach operator, formed his operation into a company, which he named "Withers Pty. Ltd."

Capital was then obtained, and new vehicles built. They consisted of Staker Squire and Saurer vehicles, weighing about three tons. These vehicles were capable of carrying around thirty passengers. More trips were added, to include destinations such as Ferntree Gully, the Dandenongs and Frankston.

The next milestone in the history of the company was in 1915, when the first lengthy tour

was undertaken.

Before long, these tours became a regular part of Melbourne life. The popularity of Pioneer was now well established.

SYDNEY TOUR

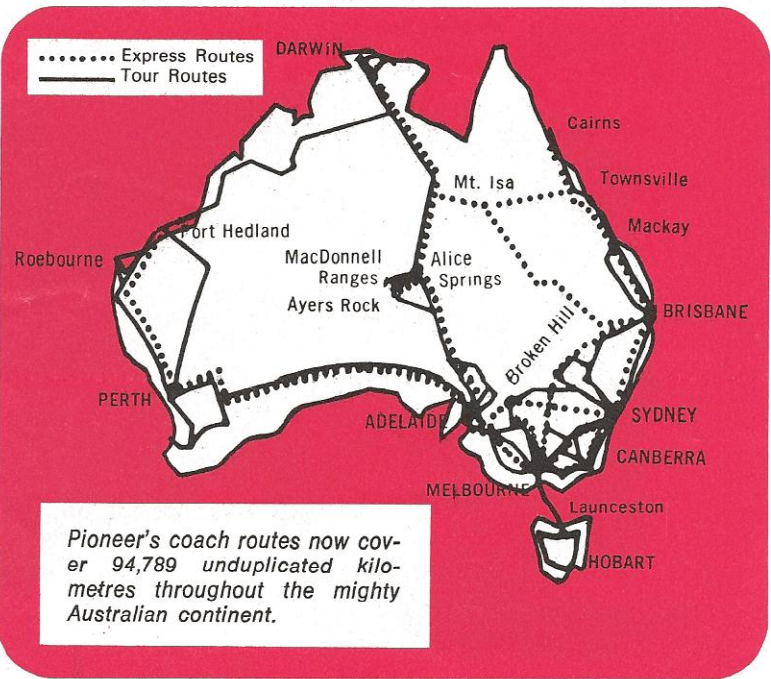
In the summer of 1916, the company launched an interstate tour . . . destination: Sydney. Thirty people embarked on this three-week adventure.

After the War, in 1919, the first Nash vehicle of the Withers company was fitted with the then revolutionary pneumatic tyres. This innovation meant a far more comfortable and fast ride, and provided the necessary basis for further expansion in the service.

In June, 1923, the company was re-formed into the Pioneer Tourist Coaches Pty. Ltd. Mr. Withers, helped by his sons, began to build up a sound business with a fleet of touring coaches fitted with the modern pneumatic tyres.

During this period Mr. A. A. Withers retired, and his son A. P. Withers succeeded him as Manager.

Under Percy Withers, further tours were pioneered, including the Australian Alps. Many regarded this tour as impossible.



the Youngest Ideas..



The new MERCEDES SUPERVISTA

The new Ansett Pioneer Mercedes Benz Supervista coach, designed for tour operations. Ten of these, built by Ansair, are to be operated by the company.

And Pioneer had held licences allowing them to operate in various States. The pre-War licences formed the basis of arguments for new ones after the War.

The most significant decision was probably the one to swing production of Ansair — the aircraft component company — to bus building.

Pioneer was starting again, almost from scratch.

Ansett executives — who in those days wore many job "hats" — knew what they wanted. But post-War restrictions made life very difficult for them.

INITIATIVE

Coaches were built from second-hand Federal and Ford truck chassis, extended, and had modified engines, steering and so on. One particular model got so big that three tailshafts were incorporated.

But the final result was the most modern bus in Australia.

Public address systems, radios and heaters became standard features.

Simultaneously, a new breed of drivers, the Coach Captains, was coming into being, many of them previously employed by Pioneer.

Pioneer even brought a psychologist into the training of men, to advise on possible passenger behaviour.

To this day, Pioneer adhere to the high standards which were laid down then for Coach Captains, because to both the passengers and the company the Coach Captain is the key to the success of a tour.

Road safety was stressed as much then as it is now.

Then, after a battle for a renewal of Pioneer licences (the first bus had to drive up to Sydney empty, on a special permit),

business developed from it, despite battles with the State Government, which wanted to keep passengers on its own railway systems.

Like other operators of the day, Mr. Ansett was forced to take to side roads and devious routes to keep in business. So, with foresight, he diversified into aviation. Ansett Airways took to the air with a service between Hamilton and Melbourne on February 17, 1936.

Now Ansett Airlines of Australia operates a fleet of Boeing 727 and Douglas DC9 aircraft throughout Australia.

Both coach company and airline came under the same wartime controls as did Mr. Withers' Pioneer coach line.

Meanwhile Ansair, another Ansett company, was turning out aircraft components in Melbourne during the War.

And, towards the end of the War, the threads began to come together.

R. M. Ansett, looking to peace and knowing the coach business, took over the interests of Pioneer. This ended one era, as the War itself had done, and heralded another.

The assets of Pioneer, were, by this time, intangibles. No coaches were included in the deal, but R. M. Ansett had a name — Pioneer — which meant something to the Australian holidaying public. He had the prospect of Pioneer drivers and staff returning from the War, looking for jobs.

and in the face of petrol and tyre rationing, day tours were started in New South Wales.

Ansair was geared up to producing about a bus a week, and Pioneer was back on the road — never to look back.

By 1948, Pioneer was carrying 5,000 passengers a week, on more than 200 routes throughout the whole of Australia — except Western Australia. It had 140 buses on the roads, with tours ranging from a half-day to 28 days.

R.M. ANSETTACTION

However, even before this stage, R. M. Ansett was not satisfied that he was doing the best for the public — so off went his executives around the world to see better coaches.

Pioneer found them at the factory of the Flexible Company at Loudonville, Ohio, U.S.A. Flexible's Clippers, with a few minor modifications, it seemed, would be ideal for Australia.

But there was one snag. Dollar restrictions meant the Clippers could not be imported. So Pioneer entered into an agreement to build them in Australia under royalty. They became known in Australia as the "Flexi".

It is interesting to digress and to note that just before the Flexi made its appearance, Pioneer Coaches — not including any other coachlines in the group — had a turnover of nearly \$2 million, and a staff of 510, as against the Ansett Airways turnover of \$580,000 and staff of 235. A further 264 were employed by Ansair.

The Flexi was here to stay. It was thought optimistically that it would have a model life of ten years. It was to last twenty.

The proposed route was virtually unknown, ill-defined and quite unsuitable for motor vehicles.

Then in 1927, the biggest tour so far was undertaken. It was a trans-continental tour from Melbourne to Darwin. The return trip was along the Queensland coast. The tour became a regular service, and was noted for its outstanding scenic and educational attractions.

ROUND AUSTRALIA

Pioneer operated its first round-Australia tour in 1934. Twelve tourists travelled in a twelve-passenger Reo coach, and a Reo-truck carried camping equipment, petrol and water.

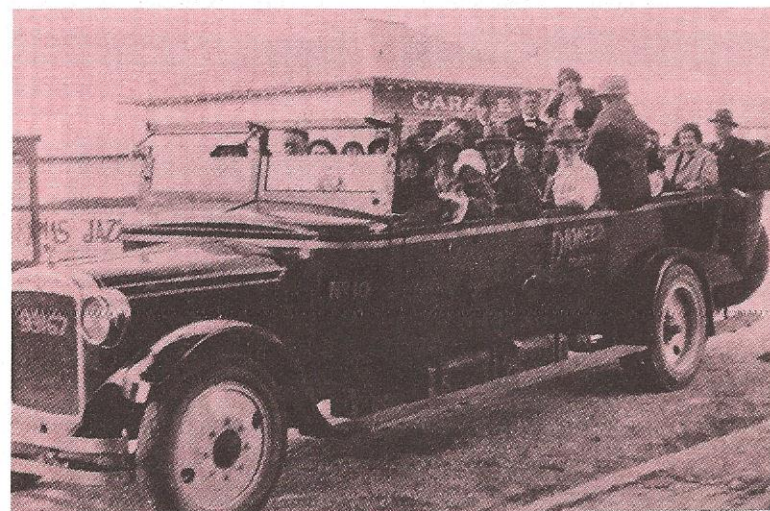
Then along came the War — World War II — which marked the end of this era of Pioneer operations.

Like so many other industries, the transport field was subjected to wartime restrictions and control, and to use for the war effort.

With operations suspended by the War, this is a suitable time to break the Pioneer story, and go back in time a little to the Western District of Victoria in the early 30's.

Here another man of foresight, R. M. Ansett, invested \$100 for a used car, with which he started a passenger-carrying business in an already highly competitive district.

The Ansett passenger coach



Tourist coach of the 1920's was a Chevrolet which incorporated improved suspension and pneumatic tyres.