

# CBW

## Coach & Bus Week



**FUTURE-PROOF FILTRATION**  
Airconco fits out Anthony's Travel fleet with air filtration package in UK first

# UNPRECEDENTED

How Stagecoach in Oxfordshire overcame engineering challenges brought about by coronavirus



### CONSISTENT CLEAN

Why Autoglym's analytical approach to bus cleaning won it a contract with Stagecoach

### GOING THE DISTANCE

ADL teases forthcoming hydrogen bus model with 300-mile range and new drive system







# COMING CLEAN

With on-bus cleanliness and the appearance of fleets now more important than ever, Peter Jackson finds out what Autoglym's Connect division offers operators – and why it's won contracts with the likes of Stagecoach and Arriva

**K**eeping vehicles clean and well-presented is one of the toughest battles operators have to fight on a daily basis. Caked-on brake dust and road grime, graffiti on the backs of seats and sticky floors littered with discarded soft drink cans are just a few of the obstacles cleaning staff might encounter every shift, so arming them with the right products for any eventuality is critical.

This has become even more of a priority in recent years, as operators try their best to encourage motorists from the isolation of their private cars and onto public transport – few are likely to be convinced to hang up their keys if their bus isn't in tip-top shape.

Speaking of cars, if you take cleaning yours seriously then you'll doubtless have heard of Autoglym. The popular British brand, part of the Altro group, is well-known for its detailing

products, used by everyone from weekend hobbyists to professional valeters. But you might not know that the company actually has a long history in the coach and bus market too.

"Autoglym is synonymous with high-end car brands and motorsport, but actually a significant part of our volume in the trade sector comes from bulk chemical support for coach, bus and even rail operators," explained Head of Key Accounts, Paul Rowlands. "We've



been in the PSV market for 27 years, originally as Autoglym PSV, although that side of the business has now been rebranded as Autoglym Connect. It's a side of the business that the general public doesn't really see, but that's changing; the Stagecoach contract was the first time we've publicly used the Autoglym Connect name.

"If I'm honest, we've never really talked much about the PSV side of the business publicly because it's so far removed from what we do with cars – the high-profile activity we're known for. But PSV is quite a big sector for us, it's a multi-million-pound market – we've dealt quietly with some big names over the years. We supply Arriva, Stagecoach and a lot of other big names across the industry and have done for a long time, we've just never really shouted about it.

"In retail, we are a highly trusted brand whereas on the Connect side it's all about that demonstrable difference in results, ease and speed of use, health and safety and reducing environmental impact – everything we can make biodegradable we do, we constantly endeavour to minimise our environmental

impact. We are able to demonstrate a cost in use benefit; although we produce premium products, an operator is going to get far better dilution and cost in use with our Connect offering than with competitors."

## Adapting to market changes

Autoglym Connect is not just a different name – its offering is very much tailored to the needs of the coach and bus industry, and further still to the needs of each individual operator. "I took over responsibility for the PSV division in 2018; we have a team of Commercial Managers, who are dedicated account and business managers for the different operators, as well as Sales Engineers

who deliver the hands-on support operators need," said Paul.

"PSV traditionally was a very service-led business, so rather than just selling products to the coach and bus market it's been about selling an encompassing service: the products you need to do the job, plus the blending equipment to ensure accurate dilution of the products and the backup and support from our Sales Engineers. We also offered consignment

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## Working with Britain's largest operator

Autoglym recently secured a contract to look after Stagecoach's 7,200-strong fleet. I asked Paul how the partnership came about. "Essentially, we've been conducting a long-term partnership trial with Stagecoach for the last three years, working with different regional Engineering Directors to get everything down to a tee," he revealed.

"But it goes back even further than that – we've touched base with them numerous times over the last 20 years. They've now moved from their previous supplier to our full service offering. We had to really convince them and show them what we can do rather than just tell them.

"Winning the Stagecoach contract was the result of the work we'd been doing with them for three years, showing them the demonstrative difference in the results that they're getting as well as the cost-in-use savings – the chemicals go much further than their previous supplier's did. The staff are much happier using them too, and there's even things like how detailed we're able to be in our reporting. It's been a huge change for them.

"Their rebrand last year improved the appearance of their vehicles. That's so important to passengers... if a vehicle doesn't look and smell clean it's a serious problem for customers. If you look at the message and tone of voice Stagecoach always uses, they're very focused on safety and quality – it's their top priority. That's been even more the case during Covid. So for them it was very much about improving their already high standards.

"We have a dedicated range of sanitisers and we've developed more of them during Covid, which are designed specifically to help combat the virus," added Paul.







Many of Autoglym's Connect products are multi-purpose

ordering, so our team went to operators, told them how much product they'd used, placed orders for them and did stock rotation – all those sorts of additional services.”

The company has adapted its services to the needs of the market over the years however, said Paul: “For 15 years-plus, that's what Autoglym PSV was. But obviously there was a cost associated with that kind of service, and as the market changed over the years, the demands of operators changed too. Whilst they still wanted a full service offering, they didn't need quite the same level of support; with all the technology that's available now, they didn't need anyone to do their ordering for them or manage their stock, for example.

“Towards the end of 2017, we undertook a review of our business model and totally changed our route to market and structure in terms of our pricing and service offering. Off the back of that, we wanted to rebrand the PSV side so we could really start making some noise in the marketplace, hence the birth of Autoglym Connect.

“We have plans to launch an Autoglym Connect website, so people can visit that and learn more about what we do. We also have a dedicated team at our Head Office to make some noise on social media, and show more of the real, proven benefits of our products.”

### Broad offering

So what exactly does Autoglym Connect offer operators in 2021? “We still offer that encompassing service we always have done,”

Paul clarified, “and we have a wide range of PSV-specific Connect products to offer operators as well as our entire Professional range. All of this combined gives operators a complete package that can tackle anything they'd ever need to.

“The majority of our customers take a selection of between three and five products from those ranges however, because our dedicated Connect products are multi-purpose. For example, our Extra Deep Clean product can be used at one dilution to clean the flooring, at another to clean the windows, another to clean the seats and so on – it can be used for practically anything bar the main external wash. It can even be used to clean the workshop floor. We also offer another product,

Diamond Shine, which is pH neutral and can be used on all exterior surfaces. There are also products aimed at specific types of industry related issues – like a wheel cleaner, graffiti remover, tar and adhesive remover and so on – but most bus operators go for the multi-purpose products.

“Our automated dilution equipment means you're getting the exact dilutions you need for each specific job, which limits wastage. We can supply and fit all of that equipment – we really do offer a full service.

“Most of our exterior shampoos are pH neutral, and none of them have any ‘nasties’ in them – they're all NTA free. So really they are the safest products to use; they're as environmentally-friendly as a cleaning product



Specific products for things like wheels and windows are also offered



## SUPPLIER PROFILE / AUTOGLYM CONNECT

can be, and they're safe to use for the operator while still having the cleaning power required. They also have enhancers in to protect the paintwork and keep it shiny. Everything we make we formulate ourselves; we have our own team of chemists and we manufacture everything in the UK at our factory in Letchworth.

"People know our products will do what we say they're going to do, and they know they'll get a far bigger yield out of our products than most of the competition. In the bus industry, there are a lot of what we would class as 'entry-level' options, offering low-priced detergent with no service to go with it. There are obviously certain operators that will always go down that route, but we're finding that more are now focusing on the bigger picture, especially with health and safety regulations becoming stricter. It's no longer just about keeping vehicles clean."

Paul was keen to stress the level of support Autoglym offers operators – it's not just about the products. "We've got our experts on hand whenever there's a problem; our Sales Engineers are able to go to site and advise on what to do," he said. "They can also train operators on how to use the products, that's part of what we offer all Autoglym Connect customers. When we go and set up a new operator, we can create a tailored training programme specifically for their business and their needs, making sure their staff can get the very best out of the products.

"We also provide detailed certification for staff that we've trained; although it's not an official qualification, the Autoglym Certification is highly regarded in the industry."

### Convenience and consistency

When I first heard about Autoglym Connect, the main thing that stood out to me as a user of its car products was how multi-purpose most of the products are. I asked how they're developed to be so versatile. "We work closely with the industry, and we carry out a lot of research to try and find the ideal solution," said Paul. "One thing I've always been really passionate about is the fact that we're far more than just suppliers of chemicals – anybody can do that, although not as well as us! But for us it's about providing an encompassing solution, which means you need to go and work with people and do research.

"We have a dedicated innovation team who go into the fine detail to identify areas that we could really help businesses. If you look at our car sector where the products are used by people doing fine detailing, cost almost

becomes irrelevant – it's all about getting the vehicle perfect no matter how long it takes. Of course in the coach and bus sector it's very different; cleaning is very important, in fact it is a necessity. But it's a cost that they're not getting any direct revenue back from, so it has to be heavily managed on efficiency. So if we can provide one product to tackle multiple tasks, it's a huge benefit to operators."

Reducing waste is another thing Autoglym prides itself on, helping to save operators money and minimise their environmental impact. "It's really important to our customers to minimise waste and the products are used as efficiently as possible," said Paul. "Our dilution equipment minimises the manual handling of chemicals, which makes a big difference, as does training staff. It's no longer a case of just telling people to pour chemical in a bucket and throw it over the vehicle! Everything has a process and is documented, because it's the only way to ensure consistency – a company like Stagecoach, with over 7,200 vehicles, wants every one of those vehicles to look as good as possible. Cleaning them all the same way makes it easier to achieve the results they're after time after time.

"For some of our Connect customers, we offer fixed prices; we can base our service on their fleet size and charge an overall monthly fee per vehicle. We manage the chemical supply for them so they never run out, all they

have to worry about is paying the monthly fee. Some customers really like that because it's so straightforward and makes for easier budgeting."

We know that Autoglym works with some of the largest operators in the UK, but what about smaller independents? "We work with almost 200 different customers in our Connect sector at the moment," revealed Paul, "ranging from Stagecoach with 7,200 buses and Arriva with 5,000 right down to small coach operators with between five and 10 coaches and everything in between. We work with independent coach tour operators, small bus companies... there's a real mix.

"Obviously the offering is slightly different depending on the size of the business, but in essence they all have the benefit of our products and services. We'll install dilution equipment at even the smallest of operators, as long as they commit to using our products."

Summarising the company's mission, Paul added: "You have to feel comfortable being on a bus, don't you? Nobody wants to think they're sat on a dirty seat – it needs to be a pleasant place to be. You certainly know when you get on one that's not clean. Our tagline for Autoglym Connect is 'For every customer, for every journey.' Autoglym have our operator customers at the heart of our business, just as the operators have their passengers at the heart of what they do." //

