

Back where it belongs

Fifty three years after it started working for a mid-Wales haulage contractor, this 1967 Foden S21 has returned home and been restored, over lockdown, by the son of its original owner. Peter Simpson tells the story...





Back exactly where it was; the Foden parked in a nearby layby with (inset) a photo of the same lorry in precisely the same place in the late 1960s.



In early 1967, Alun Davies, who was the 'son' in D Davies & Son, a small family-run haulage business in the heart of rural Cardiganshire bought, via dealership Praills of Hereford, a new Foden S21 eight-wheeler double-drive chassis-cab unit with Gardner 150 6LX engine and twelve-speed gearbox. Total cost was £4949. A few extras were specified including power steering (£133 extra), a heater and "mates seat" in the cab and, for an extra £5, an air pressure warning buzzer. Choosing a 6LX engine over the 'standard' 6LW added a further £26 to the total cost.

Local bodybuilders T Lloyd & Son constructed and fitted a flat body plus a demountable cattle box, and over the next eight years the S21 was used on a fairly typical range of work for a rural Welsh lorry at the time with cattle transport, animal feeds and timber being the most common loads. Two or three times a month it made a longish return trip with a load of sheep to Galashiels in the Scottish borders, a run which would, of course, have taken in the famous and challenging route over Shap. Another regular run with sheep was to Swindon, via Gloucester back in the days before the M4.

In 1975, the S21 was replaced by another Foden – though a Volvo F86 six-wheeler, registration FTH96L, had also arrived a couple of years earlier. The S21 was sold through a dealer, and subsequently ended up in fairground service with a large Luton-type body fitted. At this point it effectively disappeared from the Davies' view, though a few photos taken by enthusiasts during this period have emerged.

Alun's son Roy had been born in 1961, and therefore effectively grew up while the S21 was around; he was six when it arrived and 14 when it left, and like most hauliers' sons at the time, spent lots of time in the cab. On leaving school he initially took an apprenticeship as a mechanic with Beechwood Construction. He passed his HGV Driving Test in 1983 and the following year started driving for Lampeter Storage. Self-employment as an owner-driver started in 1986 with a Mercedes 1626 bought from Lampeter Storage. He formed RDH Contractors with his son Lee in 2010 and RDH is now a significant local haulage operation with 16 lorries transporting goods regularly throughout Britain and Europe from their base in Ammanford. Hiab work is something of a speciality, and their lorries often appear on spotting enthusiast websites and in online groups.



Too Late – Twice!

Anyway, the S21 re-entered Roy's life in late 2008 when "Sammy" at Llandovery Tyres – who have supplied Roy for many years - drew his attention to a news item in Heritage Commercials magazine, concerning Jeff Priestner's Dispersal Auction in Warrington: He had recognised the registration: "Isn't that your old Foden?" Sure enough it was; the lorry was being reported as unsold. The photos showed a chassis-cab unit which had clearly been part-restored to a good standard, but was in need of finishing – and, of course, a body of some kind.

Roy contacted the auctioneers as soon as he could. Unfortunately, however, he was too late, as the lorry had by this point been sold to an enthusiast in Lancashire. They did, however, pass on the buyer's details. Roy made a call, and after he had explained who he was and why he was

interested, the new owner agreed to sell it for £8000. Roy arranged to borrow a low-loader and go to fetch it back home. Meanwhile, Dad found the original sales order and the build/specification list from Foden, along with other relevant paperwork...

However, the night before he was due to set off, there was a snag. The owner phoned to tell Roy that he had "changed his mind" about selling. Though unsure whether this was a genuine change of heart or a last-minute attempt to extract a higher price, Roy decided against trying a higher offer and instead accepted the decision at face value.

Two years later, however, the owner contacted Roy again to say that the lorry was now for sale, and as he had messed Roy about last time, he was willing to let him buy it for the price they had agreed before. Roy accepted immediately but

this time he went to collect it the very next day...

He didn't, however, say anything about it to Dad until it was safely back at base, after which he collected him, and took him over to the workshop. Needless to say, Alun was 'somewhat surprised' that his old lorry was back home. Almost immediately, he climbed into the cab and looked at the wiper mechanism. He recognised it immediately. Or, to put it more accurately, he recognised a repair that had been made to it as, apparently, that had been the final job he had done on the S21 prior to disposal. Needless to say it was still intact and functioning.

Though the acquisition of the Foden had been somewhat complex and, at the end, very quick, once it was back with the Davies family there was no urgency to do anything with it, and with the RDH Business always busy, there wasn't really



Classic Foden cab interior has been restored in good working lorry condition – exactly as it was in fact.





Four generations: From left to right Nicolas and Joseff Jones, Lee Davies, Roy Davies and Alun Davies.



Alun and Mairwen Davies.



Not strictly speaking true, but the replacement body was made locally.

the time. Accordingly, the S21 was dry-stored for nearly ten years, on the basis that it would be done when there was time. At this point we should mention that Roy Davies has other 'preservation' interests including a collection of tractors. The S21 was seen as a retirement or 'when there's time' type of project, and as so often happens, there never seemed to be time...

Lockdown Project

Earlier this year, however, Covid 19 and lockdown came. Like many businesses, RDH lost work, so rather than lay off or furlough his workshop staff, Roy extracted the Foden from storage and switched them to working on it. Thus, the lorry was fully restored to the condition seen here in less than six months with Carwyn Roberts, Rhys Griffiths and Roy himself doing much of the work.

Compared to some of the projects we feature in *Classic & Vintage Commercials*, the S21 wasn't in bad condition overall at

the start; in particular, the cab and chassis were basically sound. The cab needed one or two local repairs prior to being repainted in two pack (using the correct extraction facilities of course..).

The signwriting was undertaken by Colin. The chassis itself was sound, and needed only cleaning up and, again, a few localised repairs before being repainted in black.

Most of the work needed was mechanical and fairly typical stuff for a lorry being returned to the road after many years out of use. A lot of time was spent freeing-off things which had seized through standing. The brakes were all relined including the transmission brake, new air chambers and flexible hoses fitted to the front axles, and the rear brake chambers received new diaphragms. The air piping was renewed and the hub bearings cleaned, inspected and re-greased.

The engine and gearbox were, in Roy's words, "spot on" and needed no work

beyond cleaning and servicing. The fuel system was, however, worked on with a set of reconditioned injectors being fitted along with a reconditioned fuel lift pump, pre-filter housing and the usual new fuel lines and filters. A new throttle cylinder and clutch slave cylinder were also fitted.

A fair amount of electrical work was also required including rewiring "where necessary". The dynamo and starter were reconditioned, and a new voltage regulator unit fitted. A number of switches in the cab were also renewed, along with, at the front of the cab the direction indicators, headlights and side marker lights. Unsurprisingly, a set of new batteries was also required. Four new tyres went on at the front, along with two at the rear, these being supplied, unsurprisingly, by Llandovery Tyres.

One issue was resolved in a rather unusual but extremely innovative way. A vital shaft within the power steering system was broken. A lorry breaker had one, but knowing its rarity, he was asking



1967 FODEN S21



£450. Roy thought this was too much, so looked for an alternative solution. He didn't need to look far. Son in law (and father of the two boys in the photo) Ian Jones is a highly skilled lathe operator who works for Renault's Formula 1 racing team, and is very used to making up one-off and bespoke parts. Using the original as a pattern, he turned a new one in less than three hours.

Locally Built Body

That left the body. Here, mainly because he knew that they would do an excellent job but also as a recognition of the S21's local heritage and its original

body having been built locally, Roy employed local carpenters Elgan Davies and Simon McCall who completed the new construction in around four weeks. The wood, too, was sourced and 'produced' locally; its Douglas Fir from a sawmill in the village run by Erwyn and Della Jones. The final part of the body – the headboard – was fitted the night before our photoshoot.

And there we have it. This is not, and was never intended to be, a concours or prize-winning restoration. Rather, the S21 has been restored, as far as possible, to be as Roy and the rest of the Davies family remember it when

they were operating it commercially in the late sixties and early seventies, and looks like it's recently arrived and is awaiting the next job of work for the local community.

Given the timing of its completion it has yet to make any show or other appearances, and what happens in this direction is at this stage uncertain. What is certain, though, is that this particular S21, despite having had a somewhat nomadic existence after leaving Wales in 1975, is now back, and being preserved, exactly where it belongs. It's as much a family heirloom and part of the local history as it is a lorry! **CVC**

The restoration



Returning home to Wales from the North West. The first time Roy tried to buy his family's Foden back, the vendor changed his mind at the last minute. Second time, to prevent the same thing from happening again it was collected the very next day!



Radiator needed some localised repairs, a thorough flush-out and repainting. Note also the front towing hitch which was no doubt very useful on the fairgrounds.



Like many operators in the sixties and seventies, Alun Davies had the wings of his new Foden painted black; easier to touch in after a minor scrape. This was replicated in the restoration.



Glassfibre cab was in generally good order and needed a little localised repair prior to being painted.



Chassis was sound and came up well using two pack paint; a finish that's both good looking and durable.



Rear wings in paint. The 50 gallon fuel tank seen in the background was chosen as an option when the lorry was new.



Working on the radiator panel.



◀ When new, the S21 had an extension piece fitted to the radiator filler. This was missing when it returned, but Rush Green Motors supplied a replacement.

▶ Though the engine was in good order, the fuel system needed some work and replacement parts.



◀ Roy's son in law turning a replacement steering shaft. Skilled work, but no problem at all for someone whose day job is making Formula 1 racing car components.

▶ Original owner Alun took – and continues to take – a very keen interest in his old lorry.



Work on the building the replacement flat body. Produced by local craftsmen using locally produced wood from a local sawmill...