

Ken's bus odyssey rolls on

By Cam Lucadou-Wells

Dandenong-based bus driver Ken Hansen has been a fixture behind the wheel for 45 years.

Ventura Bus Lines recently recognised the 67-year-old Warranwood driver's remarkable service, comprising 31 years on charter coaches and 14 on routes.

He remembers driving buses without air conditioning, where every window was opened to try to keep cool on hot days.

And other vehicles with front-mounted engines that could be used to warm his lunch.

"You could put your lunch bag on the engine cover and by lunch it would be hot."

In the decades, ticketing has advanced from rotary-dial paper ink machines, hole-punch tickets, the early cardboard Metcards to the present myki cards.

"What I like about the job is the friendships I have made, with drivers and passengers on tours," Mr Hansen says.

"And having the opportunity to travel to most parts of Australia in our 5-star luxury coaches.

"If you enjoy driving, then the job is so much easier."

Some of the corners of the country include long trips from Port Augusta in South Australia to Perth, or the Snowy Mountains.

On one trip to Thredbo Village, a passenger tripped and suffered a serious head wound. First Aid was administered and an ambulance was called.

"Then just off the phone, another passenger fell. Also a head injury and a second ambulance was called."

After a night in Cooma Hospital, the pair rejoined the tour.

"The doctor told me the right thing was done by sending them to hospital as the bleeding was hard to stop."



Ken Hansen with the replica of the 1924 Reo.

Mr Hansen first got his bus licence as an assistant Cub leader at 7th Ringwood Scout Group in 1975.

It was in order to drive Cubs and Scouts to outdoor activities.

Ventura's then general manager Ken Cornwall, who had three children in Cubs, had donated three buses to the group.

Mr Cornwall arranged for Mr Hansen and another Cub leader to train at the Oakleigh depot to get a licence. After five Sunday lessons, Mr Hansen booked in for a test at Oakleigh police station.

"After doing a three-point turn and a hand-brake start on the hill at the entrance to Chadstone shops off Warragal Road. I passed the test.

"Thankfully that hill is no longer there."

Mr Cornwall soon afterwards offered Mr Hansen a job.

Five weeks later, Mr Hansen started on the Boronia 16-week rolling roster.

These days, he does the school run from Mt Evelyn to Monbulk College – though it's been disrupted by Covid of late.

"Covid has impacted greatly on the bus and coach industry.

"No overseas passengers, No local day trips. No school sports. Camps not on.

"There's just a handful of students attending state and secondary schools.

"2022 has to be hopefully somewhat normal."



Ken Hansen during his early days with Ventura Bus Lines.



Ken Hansen, left, is presented with a certificate marking 45 years of service by Ventura general manager Andrew Cornwall.