

The Ford E83W Utilecons with London Transport

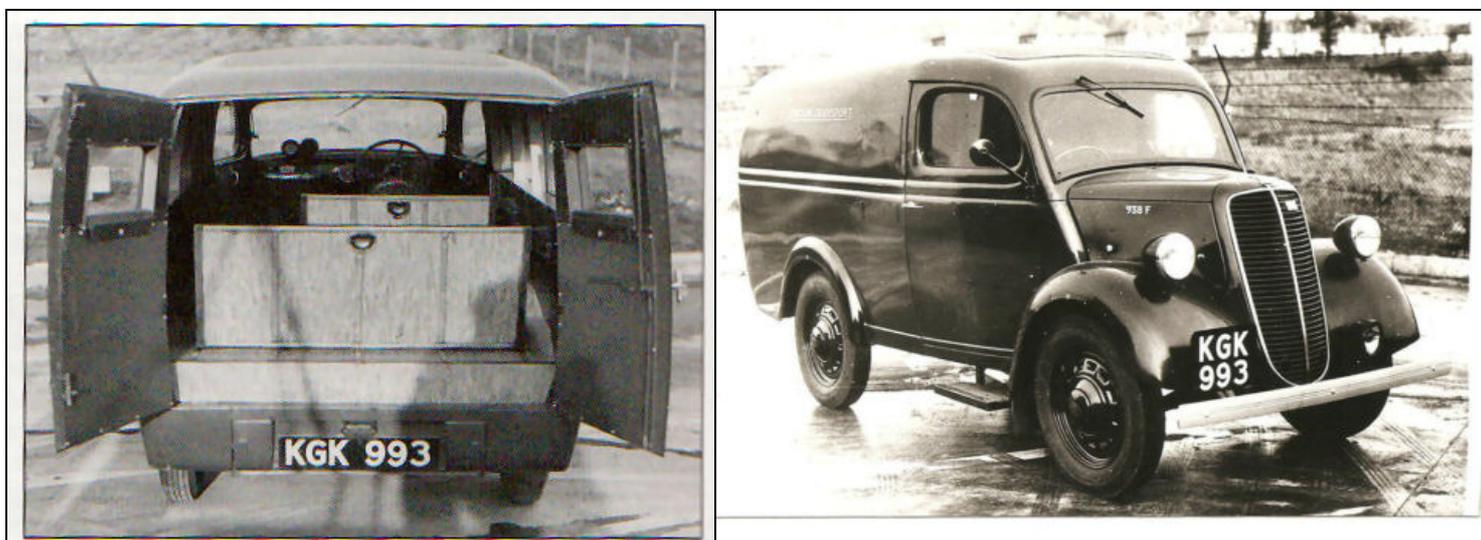
By Clive Greedus

I have always been puzzled about the batch of Ford E83W Utilecon 'B' personnel carriers 929-943F.

I missed most of them as I started spotting just as they were being withdrawn in 1959, but I had memories of being disappointed to find that one looked just like a standard van!

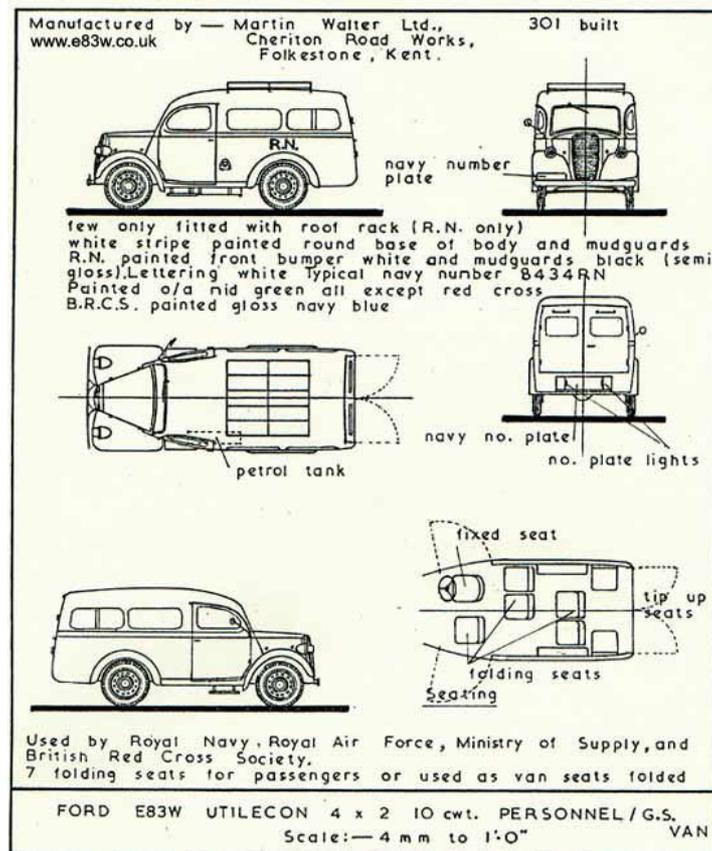
At the time I was expecting new personnel carriers to replace them, but the handful of 400E Utilabrakes that arrived during the next year or so went to other locations. Brian Bunker's records confirm that the Utilecon 'B's with the signals and permanent way engineers were replaced by new 300E 7 cwt vans, and some standard E83W vans transferred from elsewhere. It seems that their people carrying capacity was by then not needed, and that they were just being used as ordinary vans.

In Kim Rennie's fine book on LT Service Vehicles the Utilecon 'A' and 'B' personnel carriers are both pictured and described as having two rows of folding seats, and side windows, and there is an LT official photo of the inside of 938F (below left). But the view on the right shows that this vehicle did not in fact have side windows!



This is the Utilecon B with two rows of folding seats, and I believe that all the Utilecon B personnel carriers 929 – 943F were delivered like this, and without side windows.

At this time (1949) and throughout the fifties there was a 60% purchase tax on cars and "dual purpose" vehicles. The latter were vans adapted to carry passengers with fixed seating and/or side windows. LT purchased 923F, a Ford E83W Utilecon 'A' in April 1949. The drawing below illustrates the mix of fixed, folding and tip up seats in a typical Utilecon like that. Similar vehicle, 1034F, bought some years later, was LT's only other example and is used to illustrate the exterior view in Kim Rennie's book.



As a "dual purpose" vehicle it would be exempt from the van speed restrictions of 30 mph, though the E83W was not well suited to take advantage of that!

Richard Jones who runs the website <http://www.e83w.co.uk> from which I have gleaned much useful information, had not heard of variations of Utilecons so I suspect it may have been LT that came up with the Utilecon 'B' idea in order to save the 60% purchase tax. By dispensing with the windows and any fixed seating behind the driver, it was legally classed as a van.

So in July and August 1949, 929-936F were delivered to Chiswick Works and quickly went into service with signals, permanent way, and electrical engineers. Several acquired radios, a rare feature at that time, and indicative of them being directed from a control room.

The next ones, 937-939F arrived at Chiswick Works in October 1949, the first two transferred to signals at Earls Court in December, but were then quickly returned to Chiswick. It seems as though a problem came to a head then, maybe staff or union opposition to men being moved about in the backs of windowless vans! I speculate that unions might have feared jobs being lost if men could be moved too easily between work sites at night, or the signal engineers might have objected to being used like bus drivers!

Whatever, but things changed after that. 937F and 938F both went into service with CDS at Chiswick in December 1949, but the latter was unlicensed in February 1950, and joined newly delivered 939-943F in store. In May 1950, 938F was again licensed at Chiswick, whilst 939F was sent to work at Watford for the C.M.E. Railways. My spotting notes for 1960 indicate 939F had side windows when seen then at Parsons Green, so I suspect the work was done whilst it was at Chiswick.

In September 1950, 938F was again unlicensed, and sent first to Aldenham works, and then on to Reigate (which included workshops and the old Bell Street garage being used for storage at this time). Here it joined the still unlicensed 940-943F that had already been sent from Chiswick.

In February 1951 both 938F and 940F entered service with the building dept, and the preceding photograph of 938F which is dated 31st January 1951 confirms that it had remained windowless. However, my spotting notes from 1960 show that 940F (which I saw several times at Holloway Garage) had side windows fitted.

It was not until January 1952 that the final three eventually entered service for the first time some two years after delivery. 941F was allocated to Welfare at Alperton, 942F to Reigate, and 943F to St Albans. My spotting notes of 1960 recall 943F as being a 10cwt van, and I can still feel the let down! In those days – well in fact until now, I never understood that a personnel carrier could have no windows! But that 60% purchase tax was still payable if a vehicle was modified years later, so it was a big disincentive, and I suspect that all three remained windowless. The fact that two ended up in Reigate's country area may indicate that they were by then virtually unwanted!

So to summarise

923F	Ford E83W Utilecon 'A' with side windows
929-938,41-3F	Ford E83W Utilecon 'B' NO SIDE WINDOWS
939-40F	Ford E83W Utilecon 'B' side windows (fitted at Chiswick in 1950?)
1034F	Ford E83W Utilecon 'A' with side windows

Clive Greedus revised 16th August 2011