

Vivat!



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How can you recreate an authentic outside broadcast truck from the 1950s, when no such thing exists? This was the dilemma facing the recently formed Broadcast Engineering Conservation Group (BECG), and it is one that it has solved with elegance and ingenuity – as well as thousands of man hours of hard work.

BECG is, as the name suggests, dedicated to preserving broadcast

engineering technology from the 1950s, 60s and 70s, including the vehicles that the broadcasters used. The real prize would be to have an outside broadcast truck as used in the Queen's Coronation in 1953, the televising of which was a landmark in the development of TV.

In fact the truck, which BECG has christened *Vivat*, as in 'Vivat Regina', dates from the early 1960s, but it is a Commer of the type that was used at the Coronation, and of which no broadcasting examples survive. Formerly known as BBC MCR 23, with the registration 390EXH, the truck had an unhappy history.

After a chequered career, it ended up as a static classroom, when it suffered a combination of adaptation, vandalism and neglect. It was therefore not in good condition when the BECG acquired it. Some of the problems were with the bodywork, which is aluminium over steel and ash. It had rusted and rotted in places.

Another problem is getting mechanical spares. Unusually for a TV truck, *Vivat* has a petrol engine. This was a BBC specification, on advice from the military. It was believed that the vibration from a diesel could shatter delicate valves in the broadcast



In central London for the film of 'The Crown'.



Collecting the hulk.



Starting to strip Vivat.



Cab before restoration.



A little rusty.



Richard and Martin fitting Formica; Paul looks perplexed.



The boss doesn't think much of the mess.

equipment. Although this was not the case – valves were pretty tough by then – it was still BBC policy.

The starter motor and the wipers needed repairs. Sam Booth, who drives the BECG's trucks, did these. A&G, the garage that does the more substantial repairs, scoured the country for a brake master cylinder and fortunately was, eventually, successful. Although it is

possible to machine new metal parts, recreating the rubber ones would have been trickier. Another problem is that, long-term, brake fluid tends to damage rubber components. BECG has had long and inconclusive discussions about which is the best brake fluid to use.

Vivat's 4.751 engine is, Sam said, "dinky compared to today's engines". And it has a "huge steering

wheel" which means that you are sitting quite a way into the body of the truck when driving. *Vivat* hasn't, Sam says, "got low-down torque and it goes a lot better when it's warm". In addition, he said, "you are driving by the seat of your pants".

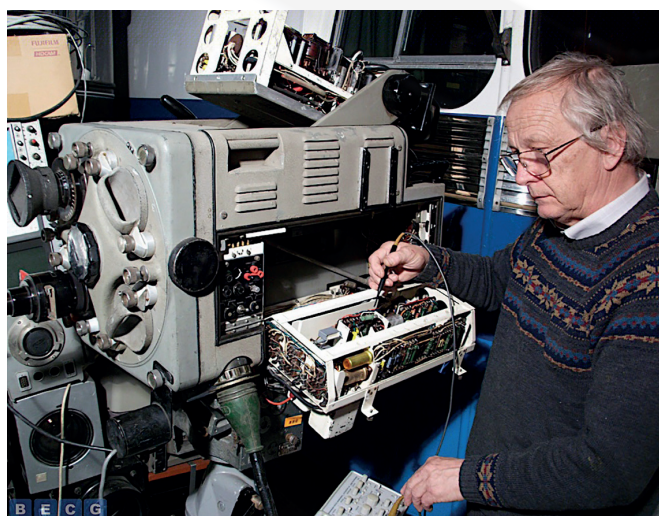
The truck has already had an important media role, as it was used in episodes of 'The Crown'. It was in the



Jill and Margaret sewing seats.



The cameras and the vehicle both need restoration.



Paul working on a Marconi MkIII TV camera. Vivat carries three of them.



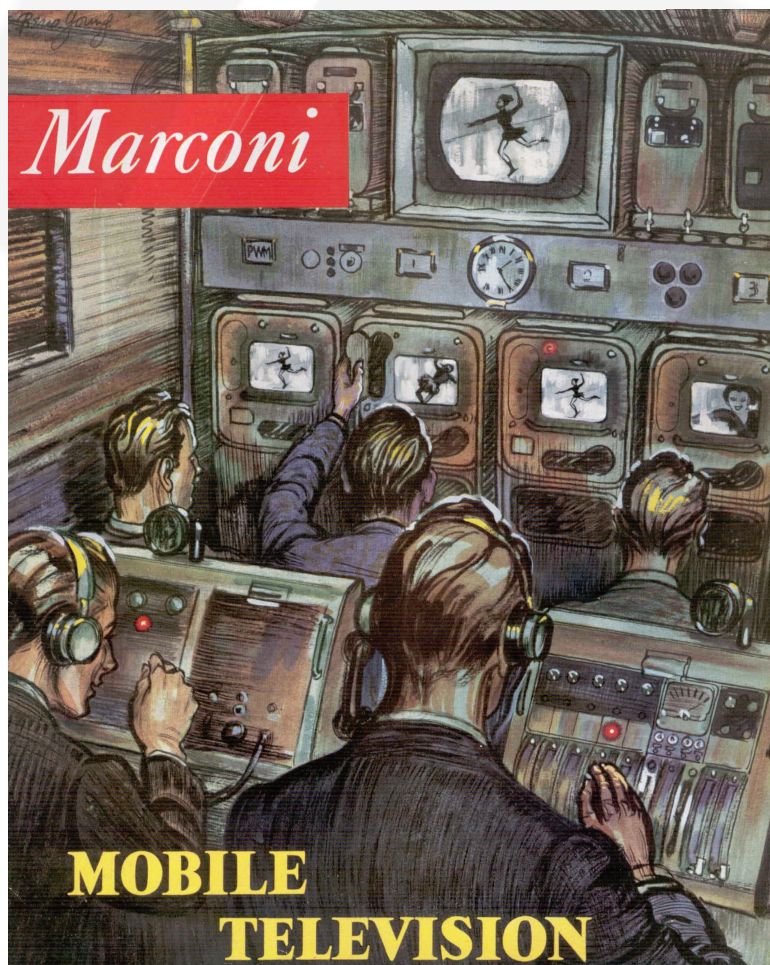
first series, with cameras on its roof, at the Queen's wedding. In the second series, it appeared both at Winston Churchill's funeral in 1965 and at the investiture of the Prince of Wales at Caernarfon Castle in 1969.

On these occasions *Vivat* travelled on a low-loader. Getting it on

there can be a nerve wracking experience. For some reason the low-loader operators are unwilling to winch *Vivat* aboard so it has to be driven on. There's no low-end torque so you need to take a run at it. Because you're going up a ramp, you can't quite see where

you need to stop and the brakes aren't marvellous.

For its appearances in 'The Crown' although the truck looked the part, not all the vintage equipment inside was installed and fully operational. Now, that job is nearly complete, meaning



Above: Marconi magazine cover showing a similar interior.

Left: Partly restored, before the BBC logo was added. The horse doesn't care.

that the truck can function as originally intended.

Acquiring, maintaining and operating the vintage broadcast equipment is a passion and challenge, and the same is true for the trucks. Why is the effort worthwhile? Dr Paul Marshall, chair of the Broadcast Engineering Conservation Group (BECG) and the man who originally acquired the trucks, said, "Working in electronics [he is an electronics engineer] you are conscious that everything is tomorrow's landfill. When the opportunity comes up, especially if it's a whole truckload of kit, it gives you an opportunity to save something for posterity."

Vivat is an example of just how worthwhile and rewarding that process can be.

- The BECG is a registered charity No:1189469. <https://becg.tv>



.Sam supervises Vivat being loaded



Vivat as a film van for the Queen's wedding in 'The Crown'.