



# Ford Transit: 50 Wonderful Facts

A collection of amazing stories  
and interesting facts about  
Transit through the years.



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## 1 *The Transit name*

When Ford introduced its all-new European van, it could have been launched as the “V-Series”. Instead, a last-minute decision saw it adopt the Transit name, which had first appeared on the German FK van in 1960 when that model became known as the Taunus Transit.



1960 Ford Taunus Transit



## 2 *Project Redcap*

The development work for the 1965 Transit was started under the code name of “Project Redcap”, with an engineering team that included Sir Alex Trotman, who would go on to become Ford Motor Company’s worldwide chairman and chief executive officer.

1964 Project Redcap prototype

## 3 *High speed testing*

During development, high-speed durability testing was actually carried out on U.K. public roads. In the last few months of the test programme, the local police became quite used to witnessing high speed night time testing by Ford engineers and often stopped the drivers to find out how things were going.



1964 Ford Transit prototype



## 4 *It all started here – August 9, 1965, Langley*

The first ever Ford Transit came down the line at the company’s Langley commercial vehicle plant in Berkshire, England on August 9, 1965.

1965 Ford Transit production at Langley

## 5 *A new Transit – for £542*

At the U.K. launch in October 1965, the cheapest Transit – a short-wheelbase, petrol-engined van with a 610 kg payload – cost £542. The most expensive Transit listed at that time was a 15-seat Custom bus, which cost £997, plus £159 purchase tax.



1965 Ford Transit



## **6 How many people can you fit into a Transit? 48!**

48 students from Barking College near London set a record by squeezing themselves into a Transit minibus in 1965.

*1965 Transit record breakers*

## **7 Lots of space for trunks**

How do you transport two baby elephants? London's Regents Park Zoo found the answer in the shape of their new 1965 Transit.



*1965 Transit at the zoo*



## **8 A favourite choice for pop stars**

The Transit quickly found favour with the pop music industry. Transit's durability made it „the roadies' favourite“ as it moved up-and-coming pop groups around Europe between gigs, often through the night.

*1966 Brian Poole and the Tremeloes with their Ford Transit*

## **9 Transit packs a punch**

U.K. boxing legend Sir Henry Cooper also worked in his family's green grocer business during the 1960s, and is pictured here together with their Ford Transit pickup.

*1966 Henry Cooper with his Ford Transit pickup*



*1966 Transit working on Swiss railways*

## **10 The Transit that thinks it's a train**

Transit versatility even extended to carrying out maintenance work on Swiss railways. A local engineer identified that the distance between its front wheels would allow the Transit to be easily converted to run on the tracks; when its work was finished, it could then drive back to base along the road.

## 11 Wrestling with all kinds of loads

This 1969 advertisement saw U.K. wrestling star Mick McManus highlighting the versatility of the Transit chassis cab for businesses that require specialised body designs.

1969 Advertisement with Mick McManus



## 12 The perfect rickshaw?

Enterprising rickshaw operators in Hong Kong purchase 200 new Transits in 1970. The Transit was declared to be ideally suited to the crowded, narrow streets of the world's most densely populated island.

1970 Ford Transit minibus in Hong Kong

## 13 Transit on safari

Wildlife wardens tour the grounds at Woburn Abbey Safari Park, U.K., to keep an eye on the big cats from their 1970 Transits.



1970 Transits at Woburn



## 14 The amazing Transit Supervan Mk1

The first Transit Supervan made its debut at Brands Hatch on Easter Monday, 1971. This hot property was based on a Ford GT40 sports racing car and powered by a 5.0-litre V8 engine. It could achieve a top speed of 149 mph (240 km/h).

1971 Ford Transit Supervan

## 15 Record breakers

To demonstrate the durability of its new diesel engine, two Ford Transits drove flat-out for a week non-stop at the high-speed Monza race circuit in 1972, breaking three world endurance records, including 10,000 miles (16,000 km) at an average speed of 73.684 mph (118.583 km/h).



1972 Ford Transits at Monza



1972 Ford Transit

## 16 Britain's most wanted van

London's Metropolitan Police cast aspersions on Transit's good name in 1972 by calling it "Britain's most wanted van." A Scotland Yard spokesman pointed out: "Ford Transits are used in 95 per cent of bank raids. With the performance of a car, and space for 1.75 tonnes of loot, the Transit is proving to be the perfect getaway vehicle..."

## 17 Dinosaur deliveries

A 15 metre long, 1.5 ton cetiosaurus pictured in 1973 en route from Kent in southern England to its new home at a natural history park in Scotland.



1973 Dinosaur transport



## 18 Overland to Australia

Hughes Overland Tours pulls up at a bus-stop looking for more passengers at the start of a 10-week 10,000 mile (16,000km) Transit bus tour from England to Australia in 1973.

1973 Ford Transit from Hughes Overland

## 19 Perfect for a sleepover

Transit has always proved a popular choice for motor caravan conversions, with its roomy interior providing plenty of space for a weekend away – even with the widest of flared trousers.



1973 Transit Caravan



## 20 Popular the world over

Transit attracted customers all around the world. This minibus – which was the one millionth Transit built – was destined to be shipped to Nigeria from the Southampton, U.K., plant in 1976.

1976 One Millionth Transit

## 21 Lipsmackin' Transit

Sporting a 1.5-metre diameter drinks can on its back, this promotional Transit was built in 1977. The spectacular exterior was matched by an equally special interior featuring a mirrored cocktail bar, luxurious seating and disco lighting.



1977 Transit can



## 22 Van of the future

This 6-wheeled Transit concept vehicle with gullwing doors was commissioned by Ford in 1979 as a vision for vans of the future

1979 six-wheeled 3001 Transit concept

## 23 Tackling the Sahara

This Transit van tackled the sand and heat of the Sahara Desert as part of the 1982 Portuguese World Tour.



1982 Transit in Sahara



1982 Transit 4x4

## 24 Taking the rough with the smooth

For businesses that needed to get off the beaten track, Ford introduced a rugged 4x4 Transit with extra ground clearance in 1982. The model proved popular with utility companies and other users who valued its performance on all surfaces.

## 25 Sent to work down the mine

Some vans have a really tough time. These Transits spend their entire working life down a salt mine in Cheshire, England, transporting people and explosives through miles of tunnels. What's more, to reach the mine workings, each Transit had to be cut in two to fit in the lift shaft, before being welded back together underground.



1984 Transits in the salt mine



## 26 *Transit takes to the water*

In 1985, Ford apprentices from Dunton, U.K., built a floating Transit to take part in the annual raft race at Southend, Essex.

1985 Transit raft

## 27 *Super-fast Transit Supervan MkII*

In 1985, 14 years after the debut of the original, Ford introduced Supervan II. This was based on another Ford ex-Le Mans car, the C100, and powered by a DFY Cosworth V8 engine. It clocked 174 mph (280 km/h) at the Silverstone race circuit, U.K.



1985 Transit Supervan II



## 28 *Flying Transit*

This Transit took to the air to become the world's first van to leap over 15 cars. Stuntman Steve Matthews undertook the challenge in 1985 to raise money for cancer research.

1985 Transit stunt

## 29 *Heading off for a quick break*

Transit has always been a great towing vehicle, but this one went that extra bit further. With Supervan II doing the pulling, this combination broke the world caravan towing record in 1985 at an impressive 170mph.

1985 world towing record



1986 Buried under snow

## 30 *Buried in snow for six months*

In October 1985, Seville resident Juan Garcia was caught by a freak snowstorm 3000 metres up a mountain pass. He abandoned his Transit Kombi, which was subsequently buried under five metres of snow. He returned six months later in the spring, and was amazed to find that the Transit's bodywork was only slightly damaged. He was even more amazed when the Transit started first time, allowing him to drive safely home.

### 31 Beware back seat drivers

This colourful promotional Transit circled London's newly completed M25 orbital motorway for seven days and seven nights in 1986.



1986 Capital Radio Transit



### 32 Transit stars on the silver screen

Transit has made countless cameo appearances on film and TV over the years. Here the van prepares for a car chase with co-star Michael Caine on the set of the film *Fourth Protocol*.

1987 Transit with Michael Caine

### 33 Transit goes retro

Although it looks like it comes from the 1920s, this retro-style van conversion is built on the mechanicals of a modern Transit.



1990s Transit-based vintage van



### 34 A big noise in the Transit world

Widely held to be the noisiest Transit in the world, this custom van features a total of 65 amplifiers and 61 subwoofers, which combine to deliver a chest-thumping 155 decibels of sound.

1990s Noisiest ever Transit

### 35 Monster Transit

A regular Transit just isn't enough for some people. This 4x4 monster truck weighed a massive 6.6 tonnes, and featured huge balloon tyres mounted on axles from a U.S. military vehicle.



1994 Transit monster truck





1995 Transit Supervan III

## 36 Even faster deliveries with Transit Supervan III

The outrageous Transit Supervan story reached its third chapter in 1995 as the high-performance delivery machine gained a new-look body-shell, along with one of Ford's latest 650 PS 3.5-litre grand prix-racing engines. This vehicle survives, albeit now with a Cosworth 2.9-litre 24-valve engine, in the Ford Heritage Collection.

## 37 Ready for emergencies

Transit's performance, toughness and reliability has always made it a firm favourite with the emergency services, from police vans and ambulances to fire rescue vehicles and breakdown vans.



2000 Transit police van



2000 World Rally Transit

## 38 Ford World Rally Transit

This special one-off Rally Transit sported front and rear spoilers, a full competition interior with roll cage and carbon-fibre bucket seats, and a tuned 2.4-litre engine capable of 0-62 mph (100 km/h) in less than 8 seconds and a maximum speed of 130 mph (210 km/h). A striking Ford Martini World Rally colour scheme finished things off.

## 39 On a slippery slope

The 2006 Transit ensured that customers were even more spoilt for choice, being the first van ever to offer front-wheel drive, rear-wheel drive or a sophisticated new intelligent all-wheel drive (AWD) system – ideal for icy winter conditions or tacking off-road tracks.



2006 Transit AWD



## 40 When I'm cleaning windows

A 2006 advertising campaign saw Ford's favourite van half way up a skyscraper, while the driver cleaned the windows from the comfort of his Transit cab.

2006 Transit window cleaner

## 41 *Still the roadies' favourite*

The Transit's popularity with music groups has continued through the decades – here Liverpool, U.K., garage rock band The Coral are pictured with their trusty Transit.



2006 Transit with band Coral



2006 Transit XXL

## 42 *Stretch your legs in a Transit XXL*

In 2006 Ford created the ultimate people mover in the shape of this one-off stretch limousine called the Transit XXL. Sitting at 7.4 metres long the XXL has four sliding side doors, plus seven leather-trimmed Captain's chairs with lots of legroom and a personal video screen for each of the passengers.

## 43 *A grand day out for charity*

This inflatable Transit joined favourite film characters Wallace and Gromit to help raise money for a children's charity at the 2006 London marathon.



2006 Transit, Wallace and Gromit



2007 Transit SportVan with Sabine Schmitz

## 44 *Transit meets 'The Queen of the Ring'*

German racing driver Sabine Schmitz caught the public's imagination when she drove a Transit around the infamous Nuerburgring circuit, Germany, in just over 10 minutes on BBC's Top Gear TV programme in 2005. Two years later, this picture shows her behind the wheel of the new Transit SportVan

## 45 *Transit goes Jumbo*

The strongest, most powerful Transit yet featured a 3.2-litre 200 PS diesel engine and could haul over 2 tonnes of cargo – no wonder they called it the Jumbo.



2008 Transit Jumbo



## 46 *Driven to extremes*

Transits get some pretty tough treatment, but none worse than Ford dishes out itself during development. The latest Transit was driven the equivalent of 11 million kilometres – or 275 round-the-world trips –and tackled extreme conditions in four continents, everywhere from arctic Finland to Death Valley in California.

*2013 Transit torture testing*

## 47 *Private jet on wheels*

This new Transit van has been transformed to offer the same experience as a private jet, but on the road. The Skyliner Concept packs the vast 15.1 m<sup>3</sup> loadspace with exotic luxury and entertainment equipment including four custom-designed leather-trimmed “throne” seats, a surround-sound movie system and a built-in bar.



*2014 Transit Skyliner Concept*



## 48 *Born in the USA*

In 2014, the Transit went on sale in North America for the very first time, replacing Ford's popular E-Series model. Transits for that market are produced in a new assembly plant in Kansas City, U.S.

*2014 Transit produced in Kansas City*

## 49 *Transit millionaire*

Transit operator Radek Němec from Pilsen in Czech Republic arrived at his local Ford dealer with an unusual complaint. The distance recorder in the instrument cluster of his 2008 diesel Transit had stopped working when the digits reached 999,999 km. A second-hand cluster provided a simple solution, allowing the Transit to continue its daily trips to Germany and Netherlands.



*2015 Million km Transit*



## 50 *Golden celebration*

Celebrating 50 years of loyal service to businesses around the world, this convoy of four golden Transits is touring the U.K. in the months leading up to the official Transit anniversary on August 9 2015.

*2015 Transit golden convoy*