

Driving ambition

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IN these days of celebrity culture, many people see the media as a glamorous job to aspire to.

But for veteran radio DJ Jeff Cooper it was the other way round. As a youngster he had two ambitions: to be a radio DJ – and to drive a bus.

The first was realised early on when BBC Radios 1 & 2 offered him a job as an announcer and newsreader and then a show of his own. That was at the tender age of 22. It's taken a bit longer to achieve the second.

Jeff explains: "One of the regular callers on my Smooth Radio show last year was a bus driver. During the many chats we had, I mentioned that when I was young driving a bus was the other thing I always wanted to do. Eventually he challenged me to try it."

Stagecoach Yorkshire offered to put Jeff through a two-week intensive course ending with a full bus driver's (PCV) driving test.



"It normally takes several weeks but I only had two weeks available, so it was an intensive regime of 7am starts, induction and instruction on an enormous 40-foot, 11-tonne bus. It was terrifying at first," says the former Hallam FM presenter who now runs his own Sheffield-based media company and on-line rock station radio2XS.

"I was thrown in at the deep end with all the other beginners who discovered that if you don't pass either first or second time, you're out.

"There was masses of technical data to learn, including a compulsory EU exam on how to check for smuggled drugs and illegal immigrants: an important part of driving a local bus in 2009, apparently!"

So how did he get on? According to Stagecoach manager Paul Lynch: "Jeff really responded to the challenge. Swapping a radio studio for a bus driver's cab must have been a shock but he threw himself into it.

"After some pretty intensive instruction he passed the test first time and he's now intimately acquainted with many of our South Yorkshire bus routes."

As to what's next – "I'm talking to Stagecoach about learning one or two routes properly, then maybe I can do some relief bus driving," he says. "Certainly a good way to get to know our listeners and where they live."