

Eyewitness Account I Drove a Bus for the MTA

By AMY HOWELL

(June 25, 2002) Okay, I admit it. I'm guilty. When driving and in close proximity to a bus (Metro or otherwise), I've let more than my fair share of swear words escape from my mouth.

As far as I was concerned, the only thing the operator cared about was maneuvering his behemoth vehicle around Angelenos in their cars—thousands and thousands of obstacles in a county-sized course.

I walked a mile in a bus operator's shoes (or maybe drove a fraction thereof in his bus), Friday, on the eve of this year's Bus Rodeo. Despite my penchant for swearing at bus operators in the privacy of my own vehicle, I was certain that maneuvering a 40-foot bus was not the easiest task to perform.

In the parking lot of Santa Anita Racetrack, I boarded a Metro bus, this time as a novice driver instead of a passenger. Reporters from local television channels and newspapers also had the opportunity to drive a bus. An obstacle course, comprised mainly of orange cones, as well as several tennis balls and ten trash can-sized white barrels, was set up nearby.

"It's a very tight course," Transit Operations Supervisor Kika Montes-Jurado later would say. "Bus operators do encounter some of these things out on the street."

Frank Cecere, the Bus Rodeo coordinator, showed me how to adjust the seat and steering wheel, press down on the brake pedal while touching a button that would put the bus into drive and push down on the parking brake lever.

A lot harder than it looks

PHOTOS BY JOSÉ UBALDO



Things that go bump in the Bus Rodeo..



Drivers wanted.



Just like in the movie: "Speed"...

Once these steps were taken, I was allowed to accelerate. In doing so, I noticed a significant difference between driving a bus and a car—the second I took my foot off the gas pedal, the bus began to lose speed.

Inching my way forward and making slight turns here and there, I realized I wasn't going through the obstacle course, but around it instead. After watching a few reporters, as well as a cameraman, I was somewhat relieved I didn't have to do this.



...and "Speed 2."

"It's a lot harder than you think," said Channel 11 cameraman Robert Varela. "I thought I was going to nail it and not hit anything, but I did."

I did take another spin around, but not through, the majority of the obstacle course. Only this time, I attempted to conquer the ten trash can-sized white barrels, lined up in two rows of five, with about two inches of clearance on each side for a bus to pass through.



On the road, again.

In the Roadeo, operators must pass through the barrels at 20 mph. They're not supposed to knock down any of the barrels—even grazing the barrels yields a point deduction from an operator's score.

My attempt at this feat was in vain: I knocked down five barrels, most likely grazed the other five and was nowhere near the 20 mph requirement.

In the obstacle course of the Bus Roadeo, points are deducted from an operator's score. In the obstacle course that, collectively, is the streets of Los Angeles County, the consequences are more severe.

I'll take that into consideration the next time I think a bus is in my way. And I'll try really, really hard not to swear.

[Back to Bulletin Board](#)