

WHEN GLENN TILBROOK was lead singer of the rock band Squeeze, at the height of the group's pop-star success, his life was a roller-coaster of plush hotels and chauffeur-driven cars, with a team of assistants to order his meals, drinks and anything he wanted.

The chart-topping band was even more successful in the United States, and it was there that he first became acquainted with the concept of luxury tour buses. Now Glenn puts the growing success of his solo career down to the home-from-home comfort of the Cruise Master RV he bought in Atlanta in 2001, plus the 1981 American Eagle which he bought to replace it and a more modest Damon Challenger which he uses for UK tours.

The Cruise Master RV cost £10,000 (\$18,000) and I spent an awful lot of money on repairs, including buying a new engine, but I honestly don't regret a single thing about it because the whole experience of touring in an RV has transformed all the bits of being on the road which I didn't like,' says Glenn, sitting in his cheerfully haphazard recording studios in Blackheath, London.

'Even before splitting up from Squeeze, I got fed up of depending too much on other people's say-so. Since 1996 I decided to get my own label and I had my own studio so I could get records out. Having an RV is just a logical extension of that. I don't rely on other people any more. I'm confident enough in my own ability to make music, and I'm confident enough to invest in myself, which is effectively what the RV is all about too. It's investing in my future,' says Glenn, with his trademark grin.

Life changing

Glenn may not be the average motorhome owner, but the RV experience has seriously changed his life. The original Cruise Master and the American Eagle – which he says is more like a Greyhound bus with a lounge, kitchen, bathroom and sleeping quarters – are both stored on a farm in North Carolina.

He caught the RV bug on his first solo tour of America, in 2001: 'The idea of getting an RV first occurred to me in America because of the sort of distances I was doing, and because I was on the road for a very long time,' says Glenn.

'By then I'd been touring for 23 years, starting out at the lowest level and getting accustomed to travelling in very nice tour buses, and staying in great hotels.

'When I started out on my own again,

I was back to travelling in a little van and staying in hotels that were perfectly fine but faceless and slightly soul-destroying.

'So during that tour, Suzanne, my partner, and I stepped into an RV store and I thought they were fantastic.

'I thought it would be a great idea to tour in one, because it would transform all the bits of touring I

Cool

It started out as transport for his former band Squeeze but now the RV experience has become a way of life for rock singer Glenn Tilbrook

A TIGHT SQUEEZE



You're probably humming along to *Cool for Cats* and *Up the Junction* as we speak. Glenn Tilbrook is one of the finest song writers from the 70s. He and fellow band member Jool Holland still have a strong following.

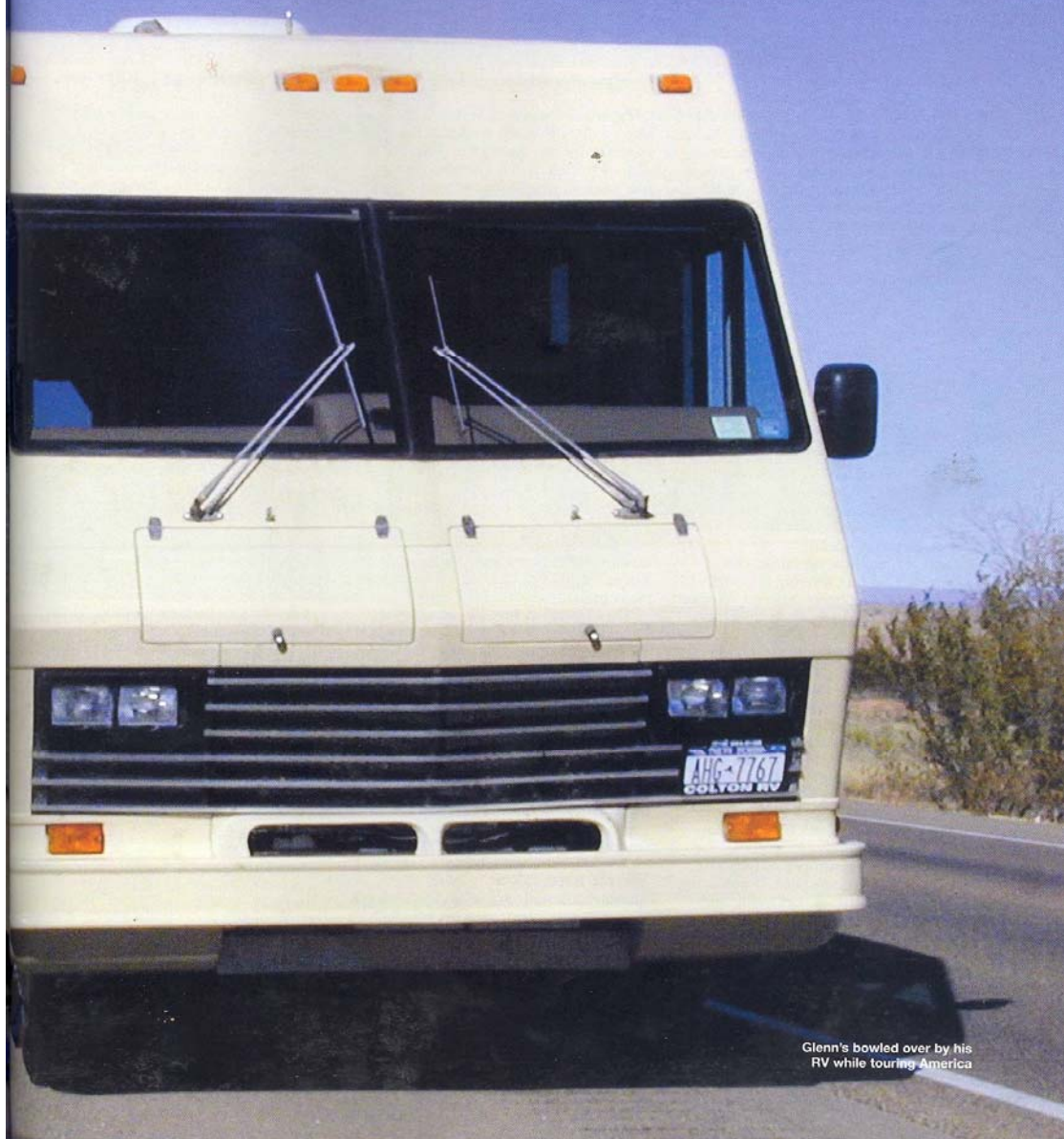
Squeeze in 1979 (left to right): Chris Difford, Jools Holland, John Bentley, Glenn Tilbrook and Gilson Lavis

SQUEEZE PHOTO: WWW.PACKETOFTHREE.COM

'Cooking is one of my freedoms. Not having to eat out or eat food you don't really like'

cruising for cats

■ WORDS Deborah Stone



Glenn's bowled over by his
RV while touring America



You don't get a view like this in a hotel



Glenn toured America in a secondhand Cruise Master and he's now planning to sell it on ebay

didn't like such as hotels, not being able to choose your food, always having to eat out, not having your own environment.

'Food in particular gets very wearing if you're eating out every night. Even if I had limitless amounts of money I wouldn't want to eat out all the time. You end up eating stuff you don't want. I always find myself longing for a freshly-made sandwich.'

Now Glenn, like most people who enjoy life on the road, loves buying local produce: 'Cooking is one of the major freedoms. Not having to eat out, or eat food you don't really like. It makes such a difference.'

Buying in Britain

Glenn's UK-based Damon Challenger, 'they always have names like that', which Glenn bought at a motorhome fair in East Anglia, is 32ft long. Driving at home, though, is a completely different prospect to driving on the wide, open roads of America.

'Pretty soon after I bought the Damon Challenger we went off to tour in Ireland and some of the roads there were small, with trucks driving towards us at 90mph. That was the great thing about having a left-hand drive, I knew how far left I could go, but you always pray the road isn't going to be eclipsed by the truck.'

The other problem with driving in the UK after a few years of freewheeling in America, is that you risk becoming too self-assured.

'After the initial difficulties I became overconfident,' admits Glen. 'I was doing a gig once at Tavistock, in Devon, and there was a small entrance to a parking area with only a few inches either side, but you've got to watch for over-hangs as well and watch for your awning.'

'So there was half an hour of holding traffic up on the one-way system in the middle of town. I was aware that everybody was feeling the pressure, but I was determined,' he says, laughing.

'I spent two weeks in Scotland last year, where I did gigs at the weekend and then stayed in the bus during the week, doing a bit of writing. It was lovely to have a nice place to go and stare at your laptop. That was around Aran and the Western Isles. We've got a generator and battery on board so we're self-sufficient.'

Looked after

Like many people who buy secondhand motorhomes, Glenn was given a hand-written book of maintenance tips by the previous owners.

'The people who I bought the bus off were really sweet. They were a couple the same age as me, but who had both been in the RAF. They'd been around Europe in the Challenger and had a great time, but wanted to settle in Spain.'

'They'd written a book of tips on how to maintain the vehicle and what things might go wrong and it's all been really great.'

'They obviously loved it, and they'd be horrified about how it is sometimes when the band's in it, because it does get messy. But it's here to be used.'

When Glenn bought the Challenger it had a satellite dish on it, but he says: 'It has fallen into disrepair and I haven't bothered getting it fixed because it was 800 channels of absolutely nothing I wanted to watch. I do have a Freeview box on it, but I've found out just how inconsistent the signal is around the country. You have to be in a town for it to work. As for CDs, I just use my laptop.'

Work and play

Although UK motorhome holidays are yet to materialise, Glenn does use his US-based RVs for pleasure, as well as work.

'During the 1980s, when Squeeze were at the height of their popularity, the band frequently toured America, but rarely managed to see any of the countryside. We always travelled straight to the next show and booked into the hotel, so we never really saw any of America.'

'We lived inside this bubble, which protected us from the outside world. But I'm 48 now and I don't think I need any protecting. I have the opportunity to plan our tours so we can go through the places we want to see.'

'On that first tour in 2001 one night, in Tennessee, there was a meteor shower due between 3 and 4am so, even though we were exhausted from working that night, we set the alarm and got up at 3am, then went out and laid on our backs under the stars just watching this meteor shower. I've never seen anything like it before or since. It was just like being in a film, it was a constant stream of light.'

Glenn made four coast-to-coast tours of America over three years, but when the Cruise Master finally broke down in Atlanta, Glenn had it towed to North Carolina, where his friend Robin, who used to drive Squeeze around, has a farm.

'The mistake I made was to use an old RV as a professional touring vehicle, which it wasn't built to do,' says Glenn. 'But, despite being pronounced terminally ill, Robin has repaired it and got it going again, so I'm hoping to sell it on ebay.'

'I'm a bit sad, because I loved that RV. It would be a great vehicle for short jaunts, but it doesn't want to drive 500 miles a day for weeks on end.'

So if there's anybody out there who wants to own a rather large piece of pop memorabilia, you know where to look. □

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PING PONG

A DVD of Glenn Tilbrook's 2001 American coast-to-coast tour, *One For The Road*, is out on Sony/BMG. His new album, *Transatlantic Ping Pong*, is on Quixotic Records. Visit www.glenntilbrook.com for details.

