

Family is just the ticket



Transport manager Bernard Seacole, Jean Plastow, Margaret Plastow senior and twins Barbara and Margaret Plastow

Women bus drivers are commonplace these days in what was traditionally a male industry. But when it comes to ownership, men still inate the transport business — unless you visit Colletts Garage in London Road, Wheatley, home of Plastow's Travel.

where you will find not just one woman in charge but three generations of the Plastow family — all female — running the business, grandmother Margaret Plastow, now 80, joined the firm in the 1950s as a petrol charge with her husband Joe, running a taxi and coach service on the side. In 1963 they were joined by their daughter, now 58, who ran the company with her partner after Joe died in 1976.

Reeling from his sudden death, they were nevertheless determined to carry on the business, and got involved with everything from raising finance to changing gearboxes, even Jean's daughter Barbara, 37, joined after abandoning a career in accountancy.

She said: "I hated what I was doing, so I joined for a short while after my father was taken ill. That was 18 years ago." Her twin sister Margaret, is also involved in the business, although not on a day-to-day basis as she is also an accountant, working at Rutherfords.

Barbara said: "It is still unusual to find women in the business. We did have a woman driver,

Maggie Hartford stops off at a traditional company where women are in the driving seat

but she left and now all six of our drivers are men."

She added: "In an industry like this you have to be strong-minded. When I came here, I was quite quiet, but now I am assertive and I stand my ground.

"Being women, I think we are more fussy about the cleanliness of the vehicles, and the fact that you are turning them out to a high standard.

"If I run up against someone difficult, I can be quite determined.

"It doesn't seem special when you have been doing it for a long time — and I saw my mother doing it, so I was brought up that way"

The family pride themselves on their low staff turnover and on offering a personal service and admit they are helped by a few men, most notably Jean's husband Bernard Seacole who is transport manager.

The nine coaches are meticulously maintained and serviced, and they have just taken delivery of a Volvo — the first new vehicle the firm has ever bought and a major

investment. Appropriately enough, it was ordered from Jo Standbridge, Volvo Bus's first female regional coach sales manager.

Ms Standbridge said: "The three Plastow generations are truly inspiring."

It brings the total fleet up to nine and they are continually updating them so that none of the coaches are more than eight years old.

But while the investment is continuous, there are no plans to expand the firm which specialises in school runs and senior citizens' trips.

It has been running outings for more than a decade for groups such as Garsington Seniors and the Oxfordshire National Trust Society.

Barbara said: "Running a passenger transport business is all about being determined and able to deliver.

"Reliability is paramount. We want to keep it as a small business that we control and which can deliver high quality

"The only thing we won't do is nightclubs and evening wedding parties — we find that when people have been drinking there are always a few who spoil it for everyone else."

But are there any other Plastow family girls waiting to take over the reins when the current dynasty steps aside?

Barbara said: "Sadly no, and neither Margaret nor myself have any plans to have a family. That is what happens when you are working hard!"

