

EXCLUSIVE: Bus driver, 31, whose 'careless behaviour' ended a century-old tradition when he slammed his mini bus into iconic steam train Puffing Billy loses his licence for just a MONTH

- **Lincoln Stiles**, 31, pleaded guilty to speeding, careless driving and hitting a train
- **Lincoln** - a Chinese national - was carrying 17 Chinese tourists when he crashed
- The rookie bus driver had been in a rush to get the tourists to Puffing Billy
- Police made no submissions to the magistrate in calling for a harsher penalty
- Court hears nothing of injuries despite a passenger being seriously hurt
- Thousands of people protested against the ban following the crash

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An impatient bus driver who slammed a mini-bus into the iconic Puffing Billy steam train, ending a century old tradition, has been put off the road for just a month.

Lincoln Stiles, 31, of St Albans, left one of his passengers with serious chest injuries after crashing the 25-seater bus into the loaded steam train in March last year.

The railway banned children hanging their legs outside of the train after the crash at the School Road level crossing in Menzies Creek.



[REDACTED] (centre) leaves Ringwood Magistrates' Court accompanied by lawyer George Balot and an associate. [REDACTED] crashed a mini bus into the iconic Puffing Billy steam train



The mini bus [REDACTED] was driving rests against the Puffing Billy after slamming into it in March last year. He received a one month licence suspension after pleading guilty



Children had been hanging their legs outside of the iconic Puffing Billy steam train for more than a century. The practice was banned after [REDACTED] crashed into it.

Children had been hanging their legs out of the steam train's windows since its launch in the early 1900s.

The ban remains today despite thousands of people signing an online petition begging the railway to reverse its decision.

Petitioners labelled the practice an 'Aussie tradition' with angry fans declaring the ban made no sense.

█████ pleaded guilty in the Ringwood Magistrates' Court on Monday to charges of speeding, careless driving and entering a rail crossing with a train approaching.

Magistrate Marc Sargent sentenced █████ to a paltry one month suspension of his licence, ordered him to undertake driver training and fined him \$2500.

The court heard the rookie bus driver, who had been in Australia since he was a 15-year old, had been travelling almost 18kmh over the 60kmh speed limit and towing a trailer full of luggage when he slammed into the train.

He had 17 tourists on board - one of whom received serious chest injuries in the crash.

In a near miracle, no-one was injured on the Puffing Billy.

High profile criminal lawyer George Balot, of Balot Reilly Criminal Lawyers, said his client had only been driving the bus for six months.



Passengers escape the wreckage of the Puffing Billy after █████ drove a mini bus into it in March 2018. His licence was suspended for a month and he was fined \$2500 for the crash



leaves Ringwood Magistrates' Court after losing his licence for crashing into the Puffing Billy steam train

'We say he's an inexperienced heavy vehicle bus driver who failed to manage his brakes,' he said.

The court heard passengers had been hoping to travel on the Puffing Billy themselves when he struck it while trying to make-up time.

'He foolishly exceeded the speed limit,' Mr Balot said.

He further informed the court that since the incident children were no longer permitted to dangle their legs outside the train carriage.

'This court should take judicial notice from the fact there were no boom gates and we would hope that boom gates are installed sooner rather than later,' he said.

Mr Balot said had apologised to the railway for his actions and since completed a road trauma seminar.

'We say he's taken positive steps,' he said.

who previously won GLV Coaches' driver of the year award - for smaller buses - was suspended from his \$1600-a-week job for a month by the company following the crash.

'He had a fall from grace following the incident,' Mr Balot said. 'It was a rude awakening for him too.'

Despite the reported injury to his passenger, was not charged with more serious offences and police made no reference to the injury in their summary to the court.

Nor did a police prosecutor make any submissions on behalf of police on what it considered an appropriate sentence.

Magistrate Sargent said the potential for deaths on the train was high.

'It's incredibly lucky that no-one was seriously injured (on the train),' he said. 'The potential was extraordinary.'

Mr Sargent noted the irony that [REDACTED] was rushing his passengers to board the train.

'They got a closer look than they had wanted,' he said.

While he criticised [REDACTED] for his driving, Mr Sargent said he would limit his licence suspension to the shortest possible time he could.

Outside court, Mr Balot said his client was extremely remorseful but 'very relieved' with the orders imposed by the 'highly experienced magistrate'.