

The Peterson Eccles



de Luxe Showman's Living Wagon



Restoration

A high-quality sympathetic restoration was planned with originality paramount to the project. This meticulous process has taken many years.

We have been assisted, among others, by a master Dutch craftsman, Rob Stolker: a carpenter and instrument maker who comes from generations of furniture makers.

The gold leaf and painted decoration on the ceiling were retouched by Hiromi Tanimura, conservator of art-on-paper, who has worked in world-class museums such as Amsterdam's Rijks Museum, the Teylers Museum and the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (also in The Netherlands), the Australian Museum in Sydney and the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Osaka, Japan.

The drawbar, bumpers and fittings have been re-chromed and the coal-burning stove has been re-nickled by one of the few remaining firms that do this labour-intensive work. The embossed leather seats have been lovingly restored by two experts from South America who specialize in antique leather.

We have used only the highest quality mahogany, lacquers, gold leaf and such, in returning this magnificent vehicle to its full splendour.

What the experts say

- **“Undoubtedly the world’s finest Eccles living wagon!”** acclaims Jeremy Curzon, Director and Valuer at Cheffins Vintage Auction in Cambridge, England.
- **“Splendid! Superb! Painstakingly restored to a very high standard. A one-off,”** declares Andrew Jenkinson, the UK’s leading caravan historian and journalist, adding:
“This is an excellent example of an early Eccles showman’s wagon from around 1930. Very few have survived so this is a rare piece of caravan history, carefully and perfectly restored!”
- Stephen Laing, Museum Curator of the British Motor Industry Heritage Trust in Warwickshire, gives his reaction: **“It is rather splendid!”**
- John Pockett (who has restored over two hundred gypsy and showman caravans, including a gypsy caravan that belonged to the Beatles) says of our Eccles caravan:
“The Petersons are making a truly beautiful job of the restoration. Everything they have done seems very correct. They are making a very fine job of the wagon.”
- David Hayhow, Concours d’Elégance Organiser remarks: **“What a beautiful caravan!”**
- Joe Elliott, Chair of the Board of Directors, Coventry Transport Museum says: **“It looks very good indeed.”**
- Professor Ian Hancock, respected scholar and authority on Romani (or Gypsy) culture says of this Eccles: **“My God, what a beauty!”**
- Thomas Acton, Professor Emeritus of Romani Studies, University of Greenwich, United Kingdom declares: **“This is stunning, absolutely stunning!”**
- Kevin Scrivens, Trustee of the Fairground Heritage Trust in Devon, says of The Peterson Eccles: **“It is a magnificent restoration... very impressive, a wonderful restoration job, very good quality.”**
- Rodolphe Rapetti, Conservateur général du patrimoine, Chargé de Mission Service des Musées de France, Ministère de la Culture, responds: **“Congratulations for the work you did on restoration.”**
- Scott George is Vice President of The Revs Institute for Automotive Research, President of CH Motorcars LLC, and associate Curator of the Collier Collection. (The Revs Institute and Collier Collection are highly recognized for their conservation and curative efforts and for their biennial symposium on Connoisseurship and the Collectible Car. Mr. George is also a member of the national advisory board for the McPherson College Automotive Restoration Program). Of the Peterson Eccles he says: **“... such a unique treasure.”**
- Willem Middlemiss, Consultant for Vintage Auctions at Cheffins says: **“Your Eccles is absolutely beautiful. It’s exquisite! It is one of the nicest showman’s wagon I’ve ever seen ... a rare and wonderful thing! It is so exceptional, almost certainly a one-off.”**
- Gregory Anderson, General Manager RM Sotheby’s, London says: **“This is quite a rare thing indeed! It’s quite unusual ...”**

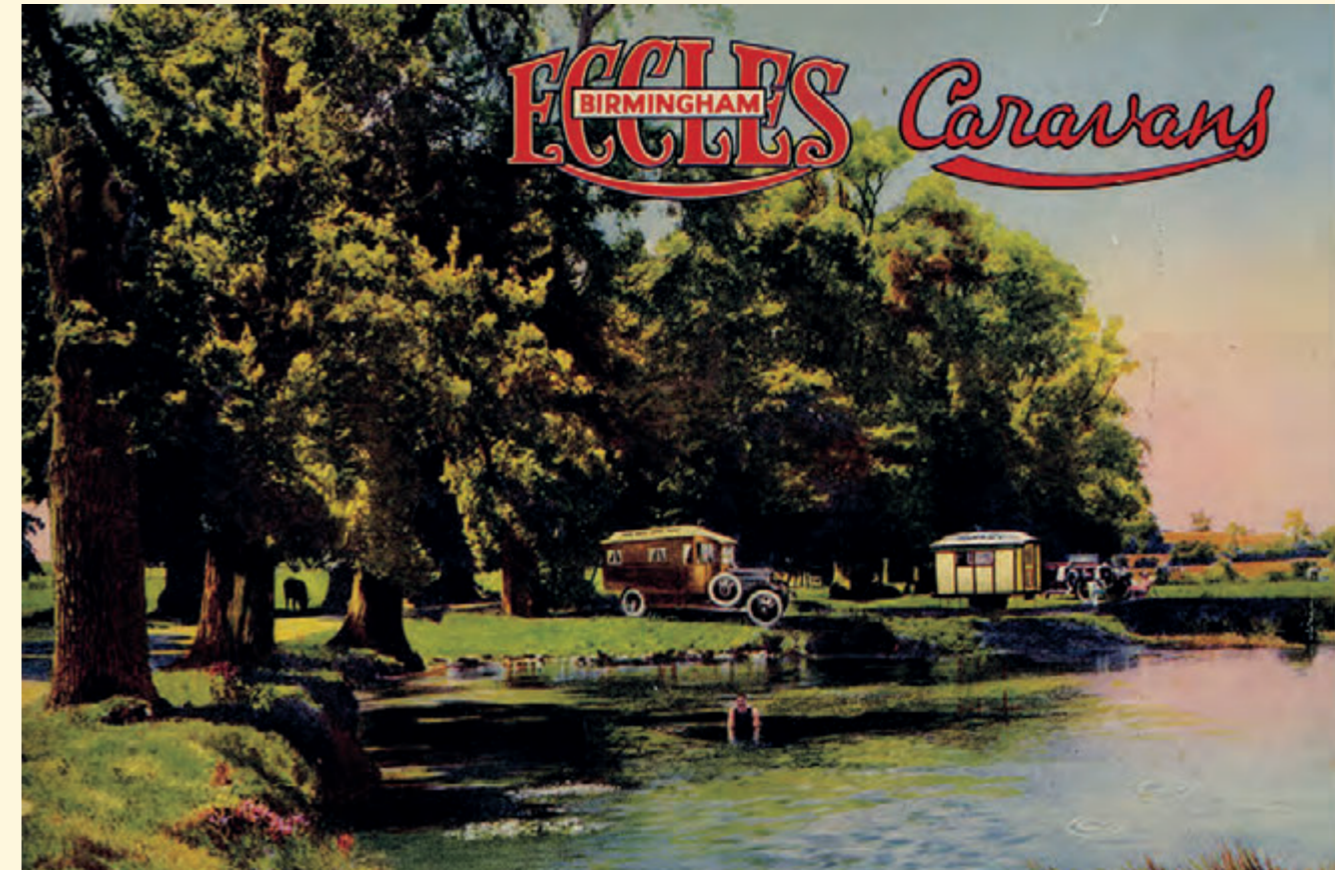
Authenticity research

In order to investigate the history and provenance of this Eccles caravan, we engaged the services of Karen L. Nield, an independent British research consultant.

She has interviewed on our behalf Britain’s leading authorities on vintage caravans, including John Pockett and Andrew Jenkinson. Sources of her investigations include The National Motor Museum, The Fairground Heritage Trust and various organizations with links to early caravans in England such as the Eccles Caravan Owners Club and the Period & Classic Caravan Club.

Ms. Nield summarized her research report with these words:

“Your caravan must be one of the very finest examples of its era in the world today, beautifully restored down to the finest extraordinary detail. Almost certainly a one-off production, custom-made to order... your vintage showman’s caravan is estimated to have been built in the late 1920’s by Eccles, in their Birmingham (Stirchley) factory which was operational between 1927 and 1961.”







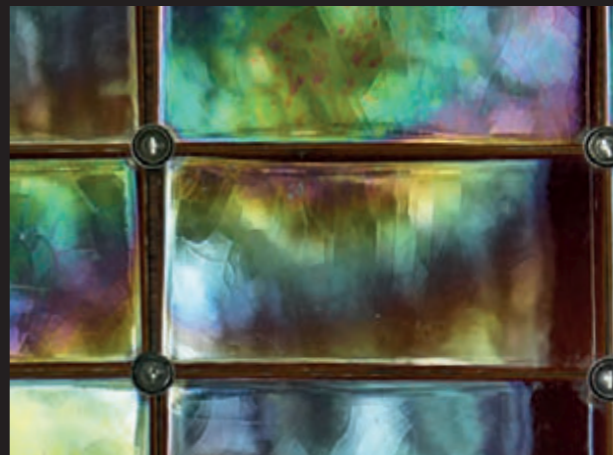






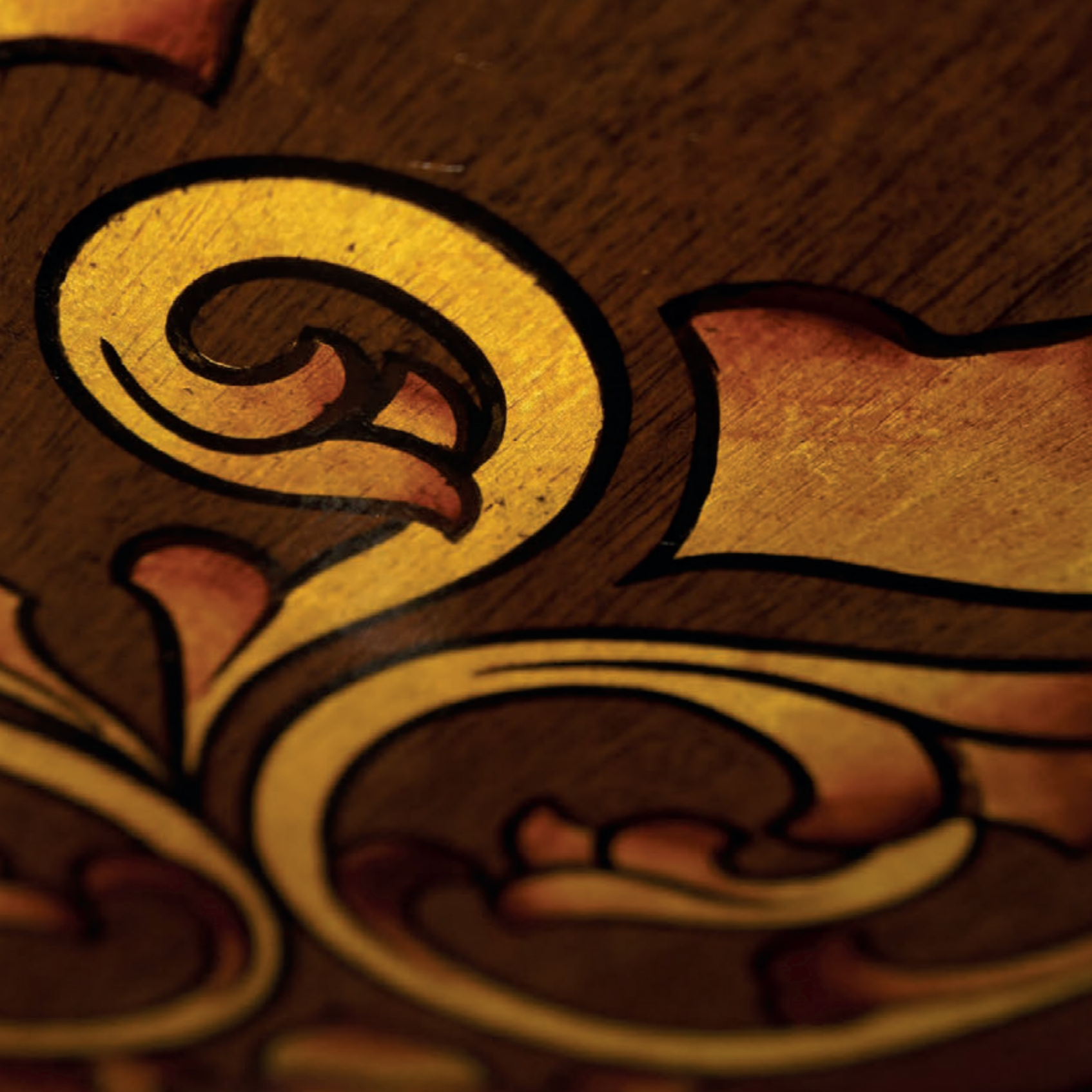






























Built in Birmingham, England circa the late 1920's

This vehicle was manufactured by Eccles, the true pioneer in the caravan industry. It was made in the first purpose-built caravan factory in the world, in Birmingham, England.

Eccles vans were much sought after by VIPs, Maharajahs, companies and organisations across the world. But, according to the caravan historian and writer Andrew Jenkinson, “some of Eccles’ most exacting clientele were showmen and Gypsies”. Therefore, he added, these ornate showman trailers were of a very high standard: “Fittings and craftsmanship were of the highest order.”

Showmen—with circuses or travelling fairs—lived on the move and on their entertainment pitches for a long season before taking to winter quarters for a few months. With their flair for the extravagant and ornate, their mobile homes had to be smart and impressive —palaces on wheels to match their owners’ claims of being the best, the greatest. Their patronage ensured Eccles employed only master craftsmen with consummate skills.

This unique Eccles, almost certainly a one-off production, was hand-built, probably in the late 1920's, in the style of a showman's wagon or fortune teller's caravan. It reflects the transition in design style from Art Nouveau to Art Deco.

Willem Middlemiss, consultant at Cheffins Vintage Auction, surmises that this showman's living wagon may have been designed and built for a fairground or circus proprietor for holiday purposes, towed by a saloon car. After touring with this Eccles, he would return to one of the large opulent living vans stationed on the circus or fairground pitch.

Specifications

The stove (Hostess Range No. 24), the cut glass windows and mirrors, the parquet floor, the fittings, the carvings, the light fixtures and the embossed leather seats are original.

The four-wheel pneumatic-tyred trailer, with an overrun brake system, was designed for haulage by light commercial vehicles or private cars.

Size

6.0 meters (19.7 feet) long by 2.0 meters (6.6 feet) wide by 2.5 meters (8.2 feet) high

Heating and cooking

Hostess Range No. 24 coal-burning stove (and oven) with Eccles mark. Made by the renowned Smith and Wellstood Ltd., Columbian Stove Works, in Bonnybridge, Scotland.

Lighting

Holophane luminaires (*ribbed borosilicate glass light fixtures*)

Outside

- Two front lights
- Entry light

Inside

- Ceiling light
- Bureau light
- Bed light

Gold leaf

Gold leaf (23 3/4 carat) has been used in abundance to embellish the uoutside and inside of the caravan.

Roof

- Canvas stretched over curved laths—*the lantern roof* construction has a raised, clerestory roof that runs the length of the wagon's roof.
- The *mollycroft* contains eight ventilation windows in two series of four narrow stained-glass windows that run the length of the upright area; these windows are wide but short casements, hinged at the top, which allow air to circulate.

Locker accommodation

Outside storage units

- Two refrigerator boxes
- Three “*pan boxes*” (for tools and utensils)

Inside lockers for bedclothes, stores, wearing apparel, etc.

- Two overhead storage areas
- Chest of (2) drawers
- Bed drawers: four small, three large
- Five storage areas under the seats
- Full-length wardrobe

Available beds

One 2-person plus an extra 1- or 2-person

Design style

The craftsmanship and design style of this Eccles showman's living wagon (or Gypsy caravan) reflect influences from **Art Nouveau** and **Art Deco**.

Recent history

We, the present owners of this Eccles caravan, moved from the United States to Europe in the early 1970's.

One day, while taking a bicycle ride through the Dutch countryside, our attention was caught by an extravagant caravan the likes of which we had never seen.

It was owned by a former strong- man in the circus, Wim Truggelaar, who bought and sold vintage caravans: old-fashioned trailers, Gypsy wagons, circus caravans and so forth. The antique trailer which we admired stood in a field apart from the sales lot. This special one, the Eccles, was bought as a love gift for Wim's wife (also a Traveller, who had worked in the Circus van Beveren as a tight-rope walker).

She told us stories of escaping from the Nazis and going underground to help refugees flee by way of "life lines" to freedom in England. Her gold teeth flashing, she produced a letter of distinction from General Marshall thanking her for her efforts in the Second World War as well as a letter from Winston Churchill for her bravery.

The ex-strongman—since buying the Eccles and planning to fix it up for his lady—had suffered from multiple heart attacks and therefore never got around to restoring the old treasure.

It was apparent that this caravan had never been touched and everything was original!

After listening to several of his stories we decided to purchase the caravan, promising to fulfill their wish to restore the Eccles to its former glory.

Caravan terminology

In order to reduce the caravan's height, **Ackerman steering** was used which is the same as that on a car where the wheels turn individually on **stub axles** unlike the big wagons where the wheels are both on the same axle and turn together on a turntable.

A **brushing slide** is a sliding shelf between the top drawer and the top surface of a chest of drawers. Originally, it provided a pull-out surface on which clothes could be laid out for brushing prior to wearing.

The **clerestory roof** is the raised story or highest part of the roof.

The **crown board** is a panel set into either end of the wagon, below the extension of the arched roof, intended to adorn the caravan. The crown board of the Peterson Eccles is in the style of Dunton Reading with decoration of acanthus foliage in gold leaf and red.

The **drawbar** is a triangular frame connected to the trailer, containing the overrun brake mechanism with cables running to the wheel brakes. The drawbar attaches to the trailer hitch on the towing vehicle. The Eccles' innovations of the overrun brake mechanism and the **ball coupling** are still in use today.

The hallmark of **Holophane lighting fixtures** is the borosilicate glass reflector/ refractor. The glass prisms provide a combination of uplight and down-light to illuminate any environment evenly without creating dark spots or glare. This ribbed glass shade/reflector, called "Holophane", is iconic in "vintage" style lighting.

The **mollycroft**, one of the most distinctive features of the caravan, is the raised, clerestory roof that runs the length of the wagon's roof.

The main roof is slightly arched, probably to keep the rain from pooling; then the mollycroft rises about twenty centimetres (nine inches), and itself has a smaller arched roof of about the same curvature as the main roof. A series of narrow windows runs the length of the upright area. These windows are wide but short casements which are hinged at the top, allowing air to circulate: letting hot air to escape and fresh air to enter.(Described by writer John Labovitz in his article, *On showman's vans, living wagons and gypsy caravans.*)

An **overrun brake** (called a **surge brake** when invented in 1927) is a brake system commonly used on small trailers where the motion of the trailer with respect to the towing vehicle is used to actuate the brake.

A **pelmet** is a framework placed above a window, used to conceal curtain fixtures. These can be used decoratively (to hide the curtain rod).

Steadies are the adjustable jacklegs (Eccles patent) used to steady the parked caravan.

Stewardship

It is with mixed feelings that we have decided to relinquish the stewardship of this rare and special object.

We seek a connoisseur with an appreciation for the choicest quality of what Great Britain produced in the early half of the 20th Century.

It is important to us to pass on this “old friend” to someone who will care for it with the respect and enjoyment that it so richly deserves.

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