

A Bad Trip

It was Monday August 5th 1957 a bank holiday. I booked on duty with my regular driver Mr. Archie Over. He was a quiet man, a member of the Salvation Army and played in the band at Redhill. We always got on well. The great advantage of being his Stoker was that he was a very experienced driver and a former Brighton man. This meant he knew many south coast routes which was an advantage as I got to see places and towns many other stokers did not.

However on this particular day we were booked to do a local run to Guildford and return as passengers. It was a special excursion going across to the western region via Reading. The engine allocated was a Q1 austerity 0-6-0 which belonged to Guildford depot. This class of engine was built in 1942 at Ashford and Brighton. They were built for heavy goods with driving wheels of 5ft 1in. They were powerful engines but not built for speed.

I somehow knew we would have problems when I saw the quality of the coal we had been loaded with. It was compressed coal dust formed into bricks with some sort of resin. I knew from experience they did not burn well. We backed out onto number 2



platform at Redhill the guard came and got the driver's name and my spirits dropped when he stated "15 mate, 15 coaches!!" and it was packed.

Q 1 Class on the Bluebell Railway

Photo: Mr. S. Leek

Soon we were coupled and away, to start with it's an uphill climb to Reigate and we were soon in trouble. Going through the level crossing at Reigate I noted the steam gauge had dropped to 160psi and the boiler was $\frac{3}{4}$ full; the fire was not burning well. However we had a bit of time to recover as there was now a down hill run for a time. I knew I would have to get a better steam pressure and get the boiler full before Deepdeen where we would start the long climb up Dorking Bank.

Before getting there Archie would have to build up as much speed as possible before the long haul up.

I managed to get the steam pressure up to 190 psi but the water gauge was dropping. Archie was a good driver and never made a big fuss about anything. He knew I would do my best. We went through Deepdeen at about 60mph and it was a shaky experience on this old wartime workhorse; we managed to keep going but the pressure in the boiler was dropping and so was the water. Stoking was little and often and using the rake sometimes to help combustion we were getting there. At the top of Dorking bank we had dropped our speed to 15mph and the steam gauge was back to 100psi. But the boiler was nearly empty; at least we were still moving---just.

Our problems were not over yet. I had to somehow get the water in the boiler back up and the steam pressure. As Archie closed the regulator down so the water dropped.

My concern was that a fusible plug would blow and that would be the end of the trip for us and the passengers. The water was so low it disappeared from the gauge glass. I put both injectors on which in turn lowered the steam pressure. It was a juggling act but again we were still moving.

As we approached Shalford Junction we would be entering the tunnels just outside Guildford, not a good place to run short of steam and have a forced stop. We made it and crawled into Guildford station; we were 15 minutes late and a relief crew was waiting. We explained the problems and wished them well for the next part of the trip. I wished we had a footplate inspector on board that day.



Left: The Stokers Tools
Photograph Jason Gurr

Right: The Passenger
Photograph: Jason Gurr

