

A Good Run

Suddenly the color signal lights turned green. Both the starter and advanced starter whistles started to shriek. At the other end of the platform, slamming of doors--city gents running to jump on the train at the last minute with their evening newspapers rolled umbrellas and bowler hats. The train was packed we had nine coaches on and a B.R. Standard as the work horse. It was 1724, another whistle, a green flag back down the platform and we were off. Stan Rapley was the Driver and I was the Stoker. "Keep a sharp look out Mickey boy and we will be fine!" he shouted above the noisy din. We were pulling out of London Bridge in fine style and going well, slowly gaining speed and pulling ahead of the electric trains that were leaving from other platforms.



Standard Class 4 76058 arriving at Redhill with the 5.25pm from London Bridge.
Courtesy A.J. Wills Photographic Collection
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It was the five twenty five London Bridge to Reading via Redhill, and we would run fast to Redhill; I knew it would be 35 minutes of hard work. It is downhill from London Bridge to New Cross Gate and

from there on for the most part an uphill pull to Merstham Tunnel and a short drop to Redhill. At that point our shift was over and we were relieved with a change of crew. At New Cross Gate we were on time and all signals were in our favor.

The steam pressure gauge was 220lb/psi; the water gauge glass was full, just right for the long uphill pull. The stoker's job was to keep a good head of steam, and make sure the water in the boiler did not run low, and in between I had to keep a lookout.

Among the stations we would be passing were Forest Hill, Anerley, Norwood Junction, East Croydon, Purley, Merstham and stop at Redhill.

East Croydon was always an interesting place, the engine was working hard at this point and the platform we passed through was always packed with people awaiting the next train. Just as we got to the end of the platform I threw a shovel of coal dust on the fire; the effect -- black smoke, soot and sparks raining down on the platform and landing on waiting passengers.

"Good shot Mickey boy!" shouted Stan smiling, although if there had been a complaint I am sure we would have denied all knowledge. It was good fun at the time, But in hindsight and 40 years on a bit irresponsible*. As we entered Merstham tunnel Stan glanced at his watch and on our exit I gave the fire a pull through with the rake so as to loosen any clinker on the fire bars, then with a few more shovels of coal we were entering Redhill Station. The safety valves lifted at 225lb/psi. I noted the boiler was full and we were on time. We were relieved by the crew who would take the train on to Reading via Guildford.

We had a short walk back to the engine sheds. I was deep in thought about how much coal I had shifted in the past 40 minutes, and what an exciting job it was working on the railways. "A good trip Mickey boy well done!" said Stan; I was again so pleased to hear those words.