

Over Stainmore Summit

Impressions of a diesel trip between Darlington and Penrith by J. W. Armstrong

As readers will no doubt be aware, local services in the Darlington area are mainly worked by the new diesel sets, and multiple unit diesel car trains have recently been introduced on the long and exacting Darlington/Penrith run.

The special problems of this romantic route were the long stiff climb over Stainmore, reaching the height of 1370 feet near the Summit cabin, one of the highest points reached by passenger train in this country—and the weather! The winter snow, and frequent high winds—how they can hamper a train at times!

For many years the line was worked by old main line express engines of such types as the *Fletcher* and *Tennant* large wheeled 2-4-0 engines, and many anxious times must have been spent watching steam and water gauges as these old timers toiled up the bank. After the grouping, outsiders from the Great Northern and Great Eastern sections were tried, but the well known "J21" engines took over in the 1930's and reigned supreme until the arrival of standard engines from BR designs.

With the diesels taking over more and more local trains, interest was centred on what would happen when the steam trains had to be replaced on "The Big Hill." This event took place early this year, the power problem being solved by working two power coaches coupled, instead of the more usual motor and trailer units.

As a railway enthusiast of many years' standing I have always felt a strong attraction for the Stainmore line, and looked forward eagerly to yet another run over it with the added attraction of an entirely different type of motive power. The opportunity came along on a morning that could not have been a better test against the elements—snow, and a strong SW gale. Memories of the old "J21's," with a crew well muffled up, and a storm sheet in position,

came vividly as I watched the Kirkby Stephen driver deftly ease his charge out of Bank Top station, the contrast being most marked. The guard was an old friend, Les Carrick, a real Kirkby man, to whom the vagaries of the weather caused no alarm. "Well," he said, "you've certainly picked a good day to see what we can do with these" (patting the driver's door of the diesel).

Waiting for a main line connection had delayed us for a few minutes, but despite the poor visibility, and hampering wind, good time was made to Barnard Castle, where we arrived almost on time. Here the wind and sleet made a blinding storm, and one had visions of really tough railway work as a warning blast on the two-tone horn announced our approach to the lengthmen who were clearing points and signal wires of snow.

The long drag up through Lartington proved no obstacle despite the heavy going, but at Lartington West the signals were on and we slowly drew to a stop at the cabin. "Wires down at Belah, and a mineral, followed by a plough, are in front," shouted the signal man, so we had ample time to survey the snowy scene for the next ten minutes, when the board dropped and the climb round Bouldron Kip curve and on to Bowes level brought us to a stand at that place still ten minutes late. A short stop here, and the road was clear to the Summit.

Now could be felt the full advantage of the new unit, and it was indeed a pleasant experience to be running practically without sound, across the deserted moor at a speed of thirty-nine—forty-two mph in a comfortable warm compartment, with the semi-frozen Greta on the left and away up on the right the nearly deserted main road. The cuttings presented a fairy-like vista with their drapings of snow and ice, while all that could be seen of the iron road was the tops of the rails in the snowy carpet.

Another signal check at the Sum-

On top of the hill! A two-car diesel train at Stainmore Summit, 1370 feet up on the Darlington/Penrith line, between Barnard Castle and Kirkby Stephen.

Photo: Northern Echo



mit, cleared in just over ten minutes from Bowes, and we were running down towards Bleathgill cutting, where more than one iron horse has had to give up the ghost owing to drifting snow. Today, however, Lady Luck was with the railwaymen for, despite the howling gale, the snow had given place to rain.

Just before Belah viaduct the diesel to Darlington was passed with a friendly exchange of "Tan-Tivy." A slow crawl over the viaduct, and another stop at Belah cabin with a warning about "Wires down," and permission was given to proceed at caution.

Onwards into Kirkby it was now a gentle run with the Eden valley stretched out in panorama to the right. At any time of the year, this must be one of the finest views from a train in these islands. For me, it was made more attractive by the snow-covered Cumberland peaks in the distance. The visibility from the diesel cars is exceptionally good, and over such a route as this, they should do well as scenic excursions.

Much as lovers of the steam locomotive are loth to see old friends depart, it must be admitted that the new arrival has a greater appeal, and a far better prospect of keeping some of the local branches going, and it is pleasing to note that those concerned with operating them are proud of their new charges.

Tell Your Friends

Good Value Holiday Bargains

The new RAIL ROVER ticket introduced in April giving seven days unlimited travel is becoming well known. There are two "Rovering" tickets - one sells at £5 and covers the whole of the North Eastern Region the other sells at £9 and covers the whole of the North Eastern and Eastern Regions, and there is a reduction for families.

Stop Press

Even newer, the DAY-LINE DIESEL ticket is to be introduced on 12 May. Again there is a choice - The Northern District (roughly Northumberland and Durham) or the Southern District (approximately the whole of Yorkshire). Both sell at 15/-. Another "Good Line" in our holiday travel bargains!



Sunshine and Shadow

It is often a tricky job to judge the correct exposure when taking photographs under the station roof. Porter T. Booth, Leeds City South, sends us this attractive print taken by him at York. The locomotive is A3 Class No.60109 Hermit with a King's Cross - Newcastle express.

Appointment of new Regional Estate and Rating Surveyor

Succeeding Mr S. F. Major, Estate and Rating Surveyor, North Eastern Region (whose retirement is announced on page 140) is Mr C. L. Smith, who was previously Assistant.

Mr Smith, who as a Fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, began his railway career at London Bridge with the former Southern Railway in 1925. He occupied progressive posts in that company's Estate and Rating department before being appointed District Surveyor (Western District) of the Southern Region in 1949. He came to the North Eastern Region in 1951, to the post of Assistant Estate Surveyor, and in 1956 he became Assistant Estate and Rating Surveyor.

As Chairman of the Regional Council of the BRSA, Mr Smith is widely known to many railwaymen in the Region. He took a very active part in the formative period of the BRSA, and has devoted much of his spare time to furthering its activities.

