

A DUCHESS EXPERIENCE 1963

It's late winter 1963 we are standing platform 2 Crewe stn ready to work The Royal Highlander (Euston – Inverness) as far as Perth some 300 miles none stop a fresh loco was changed at Crewe and will be changed again at Perth as the train as still 158 miles to go worked by Perth footplate men.

My driver is Len Basford a good mate with over 48years service with nerves of steel and a speed merchant and a uncanny way of knowing the engine's mood's Our engine to night is one of Crewe North best Duchess 46248 City Of Leeds the tender is stacked 10 tons of coal and a fireman,s friend the coal pusher saves a lot of hard work if it works ok if not it means going into the tender to pull the coal forward so one must be a where not to climb above cab height or you might hit a bridge and if it's raining it, is not very nice way to spend a few hours.

The cleaners have filled the 50qf firebox with about 2 tons of coal worth a bribe to do it, our train tonight is over 610 tons 17 coaches including 12 wheel sleeping coaches. We are now ready to depart 2225 I open the damper,steam pressure is 240psi, boiler water is just below top of the glass if any higher the engine could prime with this load.

Green light from the station staff, as the train is that long we cannot see the guard, I close the fire box door to about 2 inches to save the glare,put the exhaust injector on and set it on number 3 if it works ok you can leave it on all night just alter the setting when the engine is working hard like climbing shap ect or put on max when the driver close's the regulator try and stop the engine blowing of 250 psi wasting steam and water and your effort,when 4 safety valves are blowing soon gets the water dropping down the glass I try to keep around 235psi all night it can be done with a good engine.

Len as now opened the regulator and after a short pause, as if to get the bit between his teeth we are on the move,nexst stop Perth with a bit of luck says Len we are now crossing the north junction where she slipped but Len was all ready checking is little dance the beat of the 4 cylinders are now getting stronger, we are doing 25 miles ph Cut of at 45pc Len now puts the regulator into second valve up into the roof and puts the cut of at 35pc it is time for work I open the fire hole door and look at half closed eyes to save getting blinded by the white hot glow and the heat is terrific but no warm for the driver he is hanging out all the way to Perth freezing I start a steady firing rate to keep the box full, glance at the water gauge every few minutes, all is well full glass,steam is 240psi firing is mostly none stop if you sit down 15 minutes in the 6 hours run you will be lucky drink and food is taken between shovel's of coal even the shovel handle is now hot the blade hisses when you put it into the wet coal that why I wear gloves.

We are now well on our way, just passed Lancaster and picking up water on Hest Bank water trough's we are on the level speeding in the high 80 towards Carnforth Where the real work begins and to make matters worse we are heading into the teeth of a snow storm and gale force winds, not to worry seen it all before we have a master piece in the Duchess and a expert driver what more confident do one needs.

The firing rate as now increased, such is the demand for steam, I alter the exhaust injector setting to 5 to try and keep the water top of the glass we are now passing Oxenholme into the bank proper now Len drops the cut of to 30pc and still in second valve, it's then that you seem to have filings for the engine you have to have steam in the blood and a steam fanatic you start talking to her, come on old girl I know it is only metal but over the years I have found you treat them ok electricians included it pays dividends.

We are now speeding toward Tebay and Dillacar water trough hope they are not frozen up throw the rock cutting drop the scoop over the river bridge lift the scoop one had to learn little land marks help full in bad weather like now in a snow storm the rails are now covered Len asked are you ok do we need a banker, no everything ok any driver worth is salt thinks it's against his skill to have one.

We are now into Shap bank hoping that we do not get stopped at Scout Green things do not always go to plan, 6248 is now digging into the bank at Scout Green the exhaust is deafening Len as altered the cut of to 40pc any one standing at the line side could not fail to be filled with emotion, to see such a machine pounding away, the smoke from the exhaust 50 ft into the night sky the glare from the firebox stabbing the sky like some giant search light the fireman now shovelling coal into the hungry box like a conveyor belt such is the demand for steam, water in the glass is now half so I have increased the exhaust injector setting to 7 the steam gauge is 230psi come on old girl 2 miles to go then you can have a short breather we are now into the rock cutting 500 yds short of Shap summit hope it's not blocked with snow, Len puts the steam sanders on and places his hand on the regulator and within 30 seconds 6248 silted but Len was ready (he told me later when I asked how did you know he said I had a premonition of which I have found out in later life) the cut of now was 55pc as we laboured passed Shap Summit signal box at 27 mph but despite our gallant effort from 6248 and the train crew the summit and the ranging snow storm had beat us we were 3 minutes late at the top we had to get that back we do not like running late we stormed down the bank towards Penrith Carlisle at 86 in places (no speed restriction on sleeper coaches them days)

We are now passed Carlisle and just picked more water up on Floriston trough of which are on top of a river bridge (forgot the name) on approaching Kirtlebridge box Len asked are you ok for Beatock it's a killer if not we have to give a crow whistle on passing the box to indicate we need the banker at Beatock we said we will risk it hoping the snow plough as been out, we are now thro Beatock in to the 1 in 65 for approx 10 miles cut of at 35pc and Len increasing very slowly if to sudden might make 6248 loose her feet and that will be a test of skill from a standing start some engines with the same load ect would not do it that's knowing the ability of the engine from the start.

We are passed Sterling and Bridge of Allen and on the last lap and bank, getting tired now shovelling in trance, every joint aching legs like jelly, black as a pander longing for a warm bed it's been a rough night, the fire is now getting dirty and clinkered up had to use the dart a time or to manged to keep water well up and steam at 225psi on

the last few miles passed Hilton Jnc box into the tunnel passed Perth mpd on the left and into the station and get relived for the depo it's a funny felling when you step down onto the platform after a none stop run any one who has not felt the power of the wheels and rolling at speed under your feet have missed a thrill of life time when we walked away from the engine after being relived I all ways turn and look back with a lump in the throat and take another look at the best thing ever invented by man how much longer will we have them little did I know that in 1996 I would be driving 6229 on her last main line run on the north bound Royal Scot and my last day before retirement. The account of the run is on another Duchess Experience.

Les Jackson - (Retired Driver) Crewe North.