

## Project 22 on Tour

### A driver's view with GB Railfreight



**“Donate and Invest and win a cab ride” Steve did, he’s seen above with Richard Benyon.**

This is what we offered and this is what we did. We made a draw from the investors of Project 22. The investors are the people who make a monthly donation.

The draw was made in January and Mr Steve Bolton was the lucky winner of the cab ride. The prize was donated by GBRf, who have generously supported Project 22 from the outset. The cab ride was available on any route that GBRf operate, the winner could decide. Steve chose the British Gypsum run from Mountfield in Kent to Southampton Docks.

This service ‘4Y19’ takes 600te of empties to Southampton and brings back 1600te of loaded wagons. The one way trip is a little over 5 hrs.

Like many things, the best laid plans can go astray and our trip almost went that way. Dates were discussed a number of months in advance and the 15th March 2016 was agreed. The week before travel we found out that an escort was needed from GBRf for the duration of the journey, unfortunately there wasn’t anyone available to make the whole trip on the agreed date. Having already booked the trains and hotels, arranging another date would be expensive.

GBRf acknowledged this and made a big effort to provide an escort, luckily for us we could stick to the original plan. We always have to understand that GBRf have a business to run and we could not be their priority. Fortunately they came up trumps and sorted everything, so the trip could go ahead.

“Our plan was to be met at Battle Station by GBRf staff. However, after a slight change of plan, we were picked up at 1130 by a taxi arranged by GBRf, which whisked us to our rendezvous with 4Y19 at Mountfield sidings. We had an additional surprise, in that David Forster, the P22 chairman, was the dispatcher on the ground and had prepared our train that morning. This provided the opportunity to have a photo with him in front of the train.”



‘The view from David’s cabin 66755 waiting for the road’

Mountfield Sidings are well off the beaten track in terms of road access, they are visible from the Tunbridge Wells to Hastings line, a few minutes after leaving Robertsbridge Station and exiting Mountfield Tunnel. The single line shunt line is visible and when the train is prepared it sits parallel with the main line.

Steve and I were up nice and early, carrying a little bit of a thick head from the hotel bar the evening before, up for breakfast and a trip to Morrison's to get our food for the journey and we were away. There was no chance of us missing anything today.

We arrived to meet our train at Mountfield, to be greeted by a ground worker wondering what we were doing there, turns out he was from South Wales, Tonyrefail, a village just up the road from where I grew up and I knew his son-in-law's father, we found this out in about 60 seconds, typical of the Welsh! The whole crew were fascinated that we were going on the train, they all wished us well.

After trampling through a muddy wet yard we found our driver; Martin, who shook our hands and welcomed us warmly. In the background some 100 yards down the siding we could hear 66755 ticking over nicely. We were also met by Ben our escort and David, and had a discussion about how we were going to fit 3 of us and a driver into a Class 66 cab! 66755 is only fitted with a very basic small and hard pull down second man's seat. After a short photo opportunity with our "Project 22 on Tour" headboard fitted, we climbed aboard while David went to the cabin to dispatch us.

We all fitted in the cab, just about, me on a camping stool that I had brought, Steve behind me looking over my shoulder in the second man's seat and Ben standing, which he did for the whole journey, good bloke! Martin advised us we could ask any questions and talk to him but only on green lights, not on ambers or reds.

Our route to Southampton would take us from Mountfield heading to London on the Hastings line through Tunbridge Wells & Sevenoaks, to Hither Green with a 5 minute stop for a crew change. Then on through Lewisham, & Clapham Junction to Barnes, the Richmond line through Feltham, Staines, Woking, Fleet, Basingstoke, Winchester and Eastleigh before rolling into Southampton Central.



'Cab view waiting for the road'

David opened the points and we were away heading for Hither Green. It's an interesting line with all of the narrow tunnels. They have been reduced to one line now but it's clear why we had Slim Jims and narrow Hastings units. In places this is a fast line, gaining speeds up to 72 MPH. The run to Tonbridge is a good 35 minutes and from the cab you get a great view of the yard. Hither Green was reached in 1hr 10minutes. At this point there was a 6 minute stop at the station to change the driver. Martin left us and we were joined by Steve, he was in for a long day taking the train on to the docks and returning, loaded at 8.30 and back to Tonbridge by 23.00. Tomorrow Martin will have to collect the train and take it to Mountfield Sidings to repeat the process.



'Approaching Lewisham station'

We were away at 13.30, heading for London and the Southern avoiding lines, where we crawled through the built up suburbs of South East London.

The cab of a freight train on the main line opens up an alternative view of life; you see every day things from a different angle. A class 66 has big wide front windows so visibility is excellent. There were deer, foxes, badgers and all sorts of birds of prey that exist in plain sight for the railwayman, but are obscured from view of the man in the street. At first I thought they had adapted to the sound of this thundering locomotive, but the high amount of road kill was evident, a lot more than you would see on the road. We also noted the amount of line side huts still in existence some concrete other made of traditional sleepers.

We entered the towns and suburbs and snaked through the Victorian archways and cuttings and at times high up on embankments and bridges, so we looked down at the streets. A lot of the time we were at eye level with the rooftops and the myriad of flats and apartments where everyday life goes on. Our view was not the respectable front of the home, but the rather private and personal back of homes, looking over gardens and behind fences and under bridges you see the ram shackled buildings out of view of the building inspectors. Travelling in very early spring means there are no leaves, which, in the summer hides, a multitude of sins. It's like the railway is a no man's land where

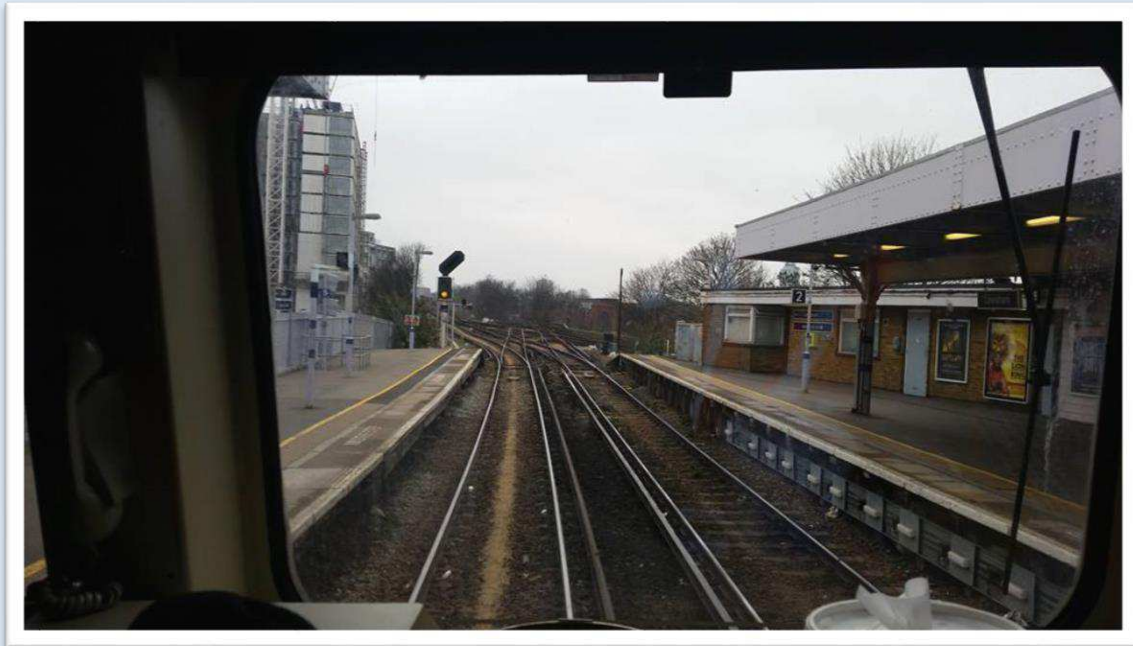
you can dump anything over the fence and it's gone. Passenger trains are too fast to make out this detail. It's only really visible to the train drivers through the winter months.

Our journey proceeded slowly through the suburbs of Lewisham, Denmark Hill and on towards Clapham. As you pass through these stations some people lift their heads with indifference as the noisy freight train plods through the station, our path hampered by the commuter trains we were following, through the city going from amber to double amber to red, coming to a standstill just as the road is clear. The 66 just takes off again, with no effort as the driver uses his route knowledge to navigate the complex geometry of tracks and signals. It really is incredible.



We were now accelerating up the inclines to meet the main lines heading out of the city at Clapham junction. There were trains coming from all directions, it seemed like organised chaos. We reached the speed limit of 15 mph and started coasting through the points on our path to the Richmond line, heading South West through Barnes. We were now 2 hours into our journey, running close to Hounslow and Heathrow Airport. One after another the 747's took off over our heads as we trundled on towards Staines at 40 mph. Again miles of houses backed onto the main line, the gardens are getting bigger now with nice lawns and tended flower beds and secure fencing. The countless abandoned and lost footballs, all makes and sizes lost forever, "once it goes over the fence it belongs to the railway" says mother, you wouldn't dare try and recover it.





We passed through Feltham station (where Steve Bolton lives) at 50 mph, waving to his missus was a short affair as she stood waving from the level crossing adjacent to the station.

At this stage we were still following the local suburban passenger trains, throwing up ambers and red lights. By the time we got to Woking Station we had picked up some good pace and we hurtled through the station, people step back on the platform and we rocked as we crossed the points 50 mph, although it felt a lot faster.



'Richmond'

Not far past Woking junction we opened up to four tracks, an up and down slow and two main lines. It was straight as far as the eye can see; full green signals and we are building up speed up to 72mph. This loco had a max speed of 75 mph, our driver constantly dropped off the throttle to hold the speed. We raced through Fleet, on through Basingstoke on through Winchester as we narrowed down to two tracks, again for our approach to Eastleigh, just after 16.00 and we were on time. We passed the busy freight yard at Eastleigh, with a number of Class 66s being prepared for an outward journey and a Colas class 70s stabled. As we filmed our journey others on the platform were filming us, we were only 12 mins away from our drop off point at Southampton Central.

At 16.17, we grabbed our bags, thanked Steve our driver and Ben our escort, who had stood for the duration of the journey, and made a quick exit from 66755 after a 5 hrs run it was nice to have a stretch. We did get some odd looks from the commuters as we jumped off our train. We watched as Steve accelerated away from the station heading to the docks for another load of gypsum.

At this point my guest for the trip, Steve Bolton and I parted company as he headed across the south coast towards Hastings and I waited 3 hrs for my cheap fare back to South Wales. Steve was excellent company, I learned a lot from him.



'Eastleigh Yard'

*As we wound our way through the tunnels and cuttings that lead to the platforms I cast my mind back to my last visit here in 1978, we used to come here a few times a year to see Class 71, 74s and 73s and the multitude of first generation MK 1 EMUs and DEMUs, not to mention the Crompton's.*



*'Nice memories of a long past era'.*

As I travelled home and thought back on the day's journey, I thought of project 22 and what it's becoming. We are dedicated and focused on our task. We all agreed at the early stage that the primary goal wasn't just the end result, the journey was also very important to us. When I secured the cab ride donation, we all agreed it was better to give it back to the investors. There will be many other opportunities like this in the future. All of the Management Committee invests monthly, but we are not included in the draw. But anyone who makes a monthly contribution is included.

These prizes are a "thank you" for your continued belief and support "Making the dream a reality" - we certainly did that today.

Our thanks go to John Smith and all of staff at GBRf for making this experience possible and for supporting Project 22.

Pictures by Steve Bolton and Richard Benyon.