

51073-The Royal Connection

Members will be aware that GRT has another DMBS, 51073, which GRT has purchased from it's owner at Wirksworth shortly before he died and a DTCL, 56047, which has come down from the Strathspey Railway in Scotland. The 2nd March 2025 was a momentous day for GRT, the owning group, as all four driving vehicles were used in two pairs, 51073 and 51074, 51104 and 56047, running from Blunsdon down to Taw Valley. This followed a lot of work by the team to check and rectify faults, replace fuses etc to allow them to 'talk' to each other. In the afternoon, a 4 car DMU was created, with 900HP from 6 engines and again a couple of trips from Blunsdon to Taw Valley and back.

Why another power car?

The previous owner, Pat Lidgett, was seriously ill, he wanted to see 51073 saved and used. From our perspective, it was in very good condition and was being offered at an attractive price. It was a long term partner of 51104, working as L594, a 3 car set with 59435 as the centre coach from 1977 until withdrawal. The keeping together of a set of 3 DMU vehicles for such a long time is unusual, as most were swapped around when maintenance was required, so the opportunity to pair 51073 and 51104 again was a no-brainer,

Another attraction was that it had achieved fame by being voted Railcar of the Year in 2013, while 2 years later, it was used to run a train for the then HRH Prince of Wales, now King Charles, on the Ecclesbourne Valley Railway. It had benefitted from receiving unused stored seating that had been restored and then left at Old Oak Common stores, so again, another plus!

Previous History

In August 1959, 51073 went new to 86C (Cardiff Canton). Within 12 months of being built, it had lost it's AEC engines, these being replaced by Leyland 680's. before moving to 84E (Tyseley) on 1st January 1963, then (Chester) on 06th May 1973, back To Cardiff Canton on 3rd May 1980, by now paired with 51104 and 59435, then transfer to LA (Laira) in November 1980. Transferred back to CF (Cardiff Canton) on 16 May 1982, the final transfer was to RG (Reading) in January 1989. Later, it went to TS (Tyseley) for Route learning, before final withdrawal from there in Jun 1995. In later years, the set was used on the service between Reading and Gatwick Airport via Guildford, with the buffet are converted into additional luggage storage, but it also covered services to Ashford in Kent, Oxford and into Paddington. While being used for Route Learning, it was known to travel as far as Peterborough and Norwich. It was first operated in British Railways DMU green livery between 1959-1962, then BR DMU green with cream lining and speed whiskers. From 1962-1970 this was amended to BR green with cream lining, and a small yellow warning panel, then 1968-1975 BR Rail Blue, followed by BR Blue & Grey livery from 1975-1988, then finally from 1988-1995 the Network South East livery of red white and blue. All units had dark grey roofs, black underframes and buffer beams. While in BR Green it had a white glass fibre cab roof, this went back as far as the driver's door, adjacent to the passenger compartment.

51074 followed a similar path, going to Cardiff initially, then Tyseley, Chester, Laira and Bristol before also going to Reading.

Preservation

51073 was stripped heavily after withdrawal from passenger service, by both BR and other preservation groups, as it was widely expected that the vehicle would be scrapped. However it was later preserved in 1996 and following a few months in storage at BSC Kings Lynn was moved to the Mid Norfolk Railway. It had come from Gwent Demolition at Margam, so arrived in the same internal condition as our other 2 power cars, stripped of glass fibre insulation, just a bare metal box, with only some seating and no panelling.

In 1996, 51073 was thoroughly cleaned ready for proposed use by the National Diesel Railcar Museum project, which later collapsed, the vehicle remaining in store. The vehicle was sent to the Midland Railway Butterley in 2004 where contract bodywork restoration was undertaken, rapidly emerging in BR Blue livery during 2005. Some work underneath was also done, returning many of the larger missing components including both engines and final drives.

Whilst 51073 had been receiving contract repairs, its owning group had relocated their vehicles to the Ecclesbourne Valley Railway, so 51073 joined the fleet there in 2006, where the vehicle was stored again due to lack of volunteer resources, before restoration recommenced in 2008 with the new and growing team based on the EVR. Apart from a thorough exterior clean, work focused on the interior with the steelwork rust treated from the inside then covered with insulation.

2009 saw some woodwork restored in January and returned to the vehicle including the internal cab-to-saloon door. On the outside, the vehicle received a new cab window. During March, the ceiling was fitted to the first saloon. Warmer weather in April saw attention turned to the underframe with many components such as exhausts and electrical boxes repainted and refitted. This work continued throughout the summer with the bogies and underframe progressively receiving a fresh coat of black. In November the No2 engine was successfully started up. Early 2010 saw the team retreat back into the interior where more woodwork was completed, before other commitments caused the restoration to be suspended in February for nearly two years. In December 2011 restoration was restarted, with work concentrating on the interior finishing. During the winter months, some of the cab wiring/controllers were refitted.

By April 2012, the passenger vestibule had the orange Formica replaced with a wood grain alternative, the ceiling replaced and both interior sliding doors rebuilt and refitted. Between May & December, all of the passenger saloons were panelled with new Formica, along with new wooden trim. The timber window surrounds were restored and refitted along with the luggage racks. Ceilings were replaced, repainted and fitted and the tungsten lighting returned. Carpet was fitted to the first class saloons and replacement lino in second class. The first class seating was then cleaned and installed. Some mechanical work was also done, with the No1 engine being started for the first time since restoration. A start was made on refitting and testing the various replacement mechanical components which had been stripped from the vehicle twenty years previously.

Inspired with the now quite dramatic visual results, the restoration of 51073 continued to progress in 2013. During January, mechanical restoration of vacuum and air components had been completed to the stage where the vehicle was able to move under its own power for the first time since 1993 (20 years). Inside the vehicle, the second class seats were fitted (completing that saloon) and restoration of the guards van and cab was started in February. In March a new cab desk and restored Formica panels were installed, vastly improving this area and the vehicle made its first full (9 mile) line test run successfully. April saw replacement lino and a refurbished driver's seat fitted to the cab, as well as the fitting of the first class seating. Exterior metal repairs to rotten cant rail in the guards van area were also completed. In May, work to repaint the vehicle was started and the guards van interior received new panelling. By June the vehicle had emerged, very smart, in BR Blue & Grey livery concluding the exterior work. Inside, the guards van area was completed with the cage repainted, varnished parcel shelves restored/fitted and also a new ceiling. Final mechanical improvements were made before the restoration was finally completed.

In August 2013, 51073 became the first Class 119 to carry passengers for approximately 20 years when it was launched at the railway's Multiple Memories gala. It was the first vehicle to be fully overhauled in house at the EVR, so held a special place in the fleet. It entered regular service most commonly paired with Class 101 E51505, although sets were often reformed using other vehicles if required.

51073 deservedly won The Railcar Association's *Railcar of the Year 2013* award.

In April 2014, as part of an A exam, the injectors on No1 engine were changed for some overhauled ones. During July, an injector pipe on No2 engine had to be replaced after it cracked in service. In August, 51073 featured in local news when it opened the rebuilt Shottle station, a ribbon next to the cab being ceremoniously cut.

The completion of Class 101 50253's restoration in September 2015 allowed the EVR to form fixed operating sets, with 51073 being paired with Class 108 50599.

The late 2010's saw DMU running reduced at the Ecclesbourne Valley Railway, which meant 51073/50599 started to be used less frequently due to the set's unusual layout and low capacity.

In 2019 the withdrawal of 50599 from service, plus the departure of another vehicle from the railway, led to 51073 being paired once again with Class 101 51505 for a time. This created a set with slightly better seating capacity, but 51073's external appearance was letting it down, so use continued to be limited.

In March 2020 at the annual railcar gala 51073 was used at the EVR for the final time, being taken out of service after the event for bodywork repairs and a repaint.

Unfortunately the Covid pandemic severely affected the railway and the ability to undertake the overhauls programme and 51073 was one of the victims. Although mechanically fully serviceable, the bodywork degradation prevented the vehicle from any further use and there was no resource available for rectification. Some three and a half years of storage followed, during which time the railway continued to review the need for such a large resident DMU fleet. 51073's low seating capacity potentially made it a less desirable vehicle.

A start on repairing 51073's filler-heavy main body sides was made in the autumn of 2023, but the work was brief and the vehicle soon returned to storage. The following year, as part of the EVR's overall strategy to reduce its DMU fleet to two sets, 51073 was sold, being purchased by GRT for use at the Swindon & Cricklade Railway. The vehicle moved in the autumn joining the other two surviving Class 119 vehicles in the process. 51073 was quickly paired up with identical twin 51074 forming an interesting 2-car set that uniquely has more first class accommodation than second! Over the winter, the bodywork has been smartened up quickly with a coat of BR blue and the mechanical systems were checked successfully.



Photo taken by Darren Ford and published in railway magazines in December 2024

51073 has currently yet to work any services at the Swindon & Cricklade Railway with its new partner. We will run 51073 with 51074 in the short term future. Longer term, 51073 is planned to reunite with DMSL 51104, which would be most fitting as that pair ran as a set (L594) for a long period in BR days (1977-1994)



56047



This is a Driving Trailer, which again was offered at an attractive price and fitted with our plans. It was at the Strathspey Railway and had been used with a Class 107 power car, but when the Railway took on a Class 117 set, it saw little use. Described as a Derby Heavyweight, 56047 is of steel construction and 63.5 feet long, but differs from the Gloucester Class 119 vehicles in having deeper windows and different seating, as it was used for local services.

Introduced in April 1957, it was based at Lincoln and the depot's sets worked the following services:

- Lincoln - Derby
- Lincoln - Sheffield Victoria
- Boston - Gainsborough then Doncaster or Sheffield Victoria
- Grantham - Doncaster
- Cleethorpes - Peterborough or Doncaster

It remained at Lincoln until all of the remaining 114 vehicles were transferred to Tyseley in early October 1987, by which time it was in BR Blue/Grey livery, in set T022. It travelled widely, being photographed at Aberystwyth and Peterborough while at Tyseley. 15th October 1988 saw the unit loaned to the Severn Valley Railway, to operate in it's diesel Gala and on a railtour of the Thames Valley. It was finally withdrawn on 4/10/89 and sold to the Strathspey Railway.

So what are the plans?

Having four driving end cabs gives us a lot of flexibility, in essence we can run 2 DMU sets, 51073 and 51104 and 51074 and 56047. The aim is to provide a 2-car DMU for service, with the remaining vehicles used to supplement, or to be taken out of service for overhaul. 51073 and 51074, 119/1's will form the initial 2 car DMU for 2025, with the option of 51104 being used to supplement it. However, it needs replating in certain areas and so that will be the second priority,

The first being to ensure that 51073 and 51074 are 'ready to go' and have passed all of their FTR exams. 56047 will benefit from an internal clean, assessment of what seats are to be kept and which are to be disposed of, replacement of the roof vents to prevent water ingress and replacement of the internal roof, this will also be the first vehicle to have repairs take place to protect and complete a 2 car set having a capacity similar to a centre car and also eventually being the unit used for school trips. 56047 requires welding work on the outside and the tired and worn paint taken back to bare metal before repainting and being paired with 51074 which has an area for wheelchair users.

51073 has been cleaned externally and has been given a coat of BR Blue on it's Blunsdon side to match the Purton side as a 1968 style BR blue with full yellow end. 51074 has also had this treatment and been placed into 1967 BR blue with small yellow panel giving a look that the 114 will share becoming set L595 together.

51104 also requires some welding work, before being paired with 51073, including internal lights fitting and a heater reinstated, with a corridor replacement and put into a western DMU green as set L594 as carried for their paired life and with 51073.

