

SR BOGIE GUARDS VAN S 256

This non-gangwayed passenger brake van was built around 1952/3 and formed part of the third, and final, batch of Bogie Guard's Vans. S 256 was constructed by British Railways as part of Order No. L 3227 (vehicles S251-280) and designated as a 'B' van. The design conformed with the former SR Gauge Restriction '0' which meant they could be used on any route in the south.

The 50 ft underframe was constructed, with wooden bodywork and other fitments, at BR's Lancing Carriage & Wagon Works near Shoreham-by-Sea in West Sussex. Despite these final 30 B Vans being built after Nationalisation the original SR Design Diagram No. 3093 was used without updating.

This basic design covered the installation of a central Guard's compartment. It had an emergency vacuum brake handle, a hand wheel to apply the clasp brakes (when the van was stabled) plus other equipment needed by a Guard to carry out their duties. Exterior livery was BR Crimson Lake with ends, underframes and bogies in Black with a Grey roof.

The wooden bodyside is made of alternate wide (6½ inch) and narrow (3½ inch) planking and this includes the four sets of double doors on each side. However, the Guard's external doors have a different design. An internal sliding door permitted entry to each luggage area. Because of loading gauge restrictions a Guard's periscope was fitted in the roof but this was removed by BR, probably in the mid-1970s, along with SR designed 'torpedo' roof ventilators. It weighs 26 Tons, is fitted with steam heat pipes (connected to a small radiator in the Guard's compartment) and runs on a pair of SR 8 ft bogies which are vacuum braked.

S 256 would have been overhauled and repainted many times during its working life. BR (S) Passenger Green would have been applied after 1956. Then, from mid-1967, the 'in' colour was BR's all over matt Blue including the ends. Cleaning was not undertaken rigorously, however, so dirt and brake dust were the normal 'livery' for many years.

S 256 worked for almost 35 years mainly on BR's South Western Division, more or less continually, in newspaper and/or parcels workings. It was taken out of revenue earning service and officially condemned in 1986. S 256 was noted in sidings at Leyton, East London, on 6th December 1986, with several other similar vans. It is possible they were all withdrawn by then awaiting purchase or scrapping.

Apparently S 256 was purchased in 1987 and moved to the Pullman Car Sheds at Preston Park being added to the collection of stock building up as part of the proposals for a Brighton Railway Museum. In the event this came to nothing as, in 2003, vandals repeatedly broke into the site, graffitied the contents and eventually set fire to the building, destroying the northern end.

In September of 2008, it was decided to demolish the remains of the Pullman building and on Sunday 7th, an intricate plan created in order to remove the stock from within. The Pullman Works was used for many years as a store for some remarkably historic rolling stock many of which were there pending eventual transfer to the National Railway Museum in York.

Jerry Swift, Network Rail's head of Corporate Responsibility, spent a considerable amount of time and effort liaising with the National Railway Museum sifting through archives in order to ascertain ownership of some of the items of stock, some of which had been recognised by the NRM as being of important historical significance.

Due to the lack of road access, the nearest loading point was Lovers Walk depot. This meant that everything had to be shunted into Brighton Station, across the main lines to the Eastern side of the tracks, thence into Lovers Walk. Another problem was that the stability of track work in the Pullman Works could not be verified after 40 years of neglect. They would almost certainly not support the weight of the class 73 electro-diesel which was used to move the stock. The same level of neglect also meant that several items of the stock had to have work carried out on their axles before they could be safely removed.

Among the items removed included the body of the apparently long lost Pullman sleeper car 'Balmoral', which moved to Stately Trains at Embsay for restoration. Thanks to this £110,000 removal exercise, 11 items of historic rolling stock were rehoused rather than scrapped. S 256 arrived in Swanage and was immediately stored. During 2010 it went to the East Somerset Railway for some attention but, by November, it had returned for completion of work by Swanage volunteers. It was adapted for use as a base for Swanage Railway's youth group, the Sygnets, and currently is painted in an Oxford Blue livery.

Information compiled by Peter Sykes 30th September 2021