

SR BOGIE GUARDS VAN (Van B) S 385

This non-gangwayed Bogie Guards Van, or 'Van B' is the first Southern Railway Bogie Guards Van in heritage preservation.

S385 was out shipped from Southern Railway's Eastleigh Carriage & Wagon Works, in late August 1938, having used an underframe built at SR's Ashford Carriage Works in Kent. The design diagram was No. 3093 and it formed part of Lot No.A927 comprising 50 vehicles (S350 – S399) which was authorised in March 1936.

The frame was 50 feet long over head stocks but, once buffers were added, the length became 53 ft 8½ins. Before construction started, however, the design was amended to include the installation of a central Guard's compartment. The wooden bodyside is made of alternate narrow and wide 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 width loading gauge restrictions a Guard's periscope was fitted in the roof which meant the vehicle's height was 12ft 8ins. This was removed by BR, probably in the mid-1970s, along with the SR 'torpedo' roof ventilators.

It weighs 28 Tons, when empty, has steam heat piping to work with passenger stock and is also fitted with a small radiator for the Guard. It runs on a pair of vacuum braked SR bogies. The centrally located Guard's compartment is 4ft 6ins wide and flanked by two luggage compartments each just under 22ft 6ins long.

By 1946, the Guard's compartment of S385 had received a stove in addition to the radiator. Thus fitted, - an Orange panel was painted on the top left and top right bodysides as well as a similar panel on the Guard's doors. Special workings were published for stove-fitted vans which were not to work off the Southern Railway.

It worked on the Southern Railway Western Section, followed by BR (South Western Division), more or less continually in assorted newspaper and/or parcels workings. From 1969, - BR declared that the Guard's compartments of Van B's were no longer in use and light fittings were removed. Their use across the system became more widespread as years went by as typified by the use of one on the rear of the 20:00 Kings Cross to Aberdeen on 6th June 1978.

With a downturn in parcels and mail traffic, many of the remaining Van B's were declared surplus to requirements during the 1980s. S385 suffered that fate on Thursday 8th October 1981 and was moved to Basingstoke sidings. During the following month it was purchased by a member of the Southern Steam Trust. In mid January 1982 it was moved to Swanage at the same time as SR Brake Compartment Third coach S 2768.

It was subsequently restored, working lighting reinstated and is now used by the heritage carriage group as a store.

Information collated by Peter Sykes 6th October 2021

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