

BR “DOGFISH” 24T BALLAST HOPPER DB 983194

Origins of this type of ballast hopper wagon can be traced back to the London Midland & Scottish/London & North Eastern Railways 'Trout' design, and the even earlier hoppers built by Leeds Forge for, amongst others, the South Eastern & Chatham Railway in 1911.

British Railways (BR) was undergoing major work to its permanent way, during the 1950's, still recovering from a lack of work due to the Second World War. It ordered large quantities of ballast hopper wagons and contracted railway wagon builders Charles Roberts Ltd based at Horbury Junction near Wakefield and Metropolitan-Cammell Carriage and Wagon Company Ltd of Birmingham. The 24 Ton 'Dogfish' (and smaller 19 ton 'Catfish') became BR's standard small ballast hopper wagons.

B 983194 was included in the eighth batch of 310 wagons (B983000 – B983309) under Lot number 2939 to design diagram 1/587. Charles Roberts started releasing them to traffic in April and finished the batch in December 1957. It is believed that B 983194 was outshopped at the end of August or beginning of September.

Initially, B 983194 was allocated to the Batts Combe Quarry, Cheddar on Western Region. Quarrying there could be traced back to around 1924 or 1926 with the stone, mostly Burrington Oolite, being long recognised for its high purity (approaching 99% calcium carbonate) with reserves amounting to 50 million tonnes.

Ten lots were eventually issued covering the construction of 1249 'Dogfish' wagons, over 5 years, with the first 7 being split between Metro-Cammell and Charles Roberts & Co. The final three lots were built at BR Shildon. These became the most numerous of ballast hopper designs in the engineers' fleet.

Their 4 wheel chassis had a 14 ft wheelbase and measured 22ft 6in over headstocks. They were fitted with vacuum brakes from new and many lasted into the 1990s. The 'Dogfish' had three unloading chutes, giving the ability to discharge new ballast between the rails or to either side. To achieve this, the end control platform featured three hand wheels and, at the other end of the underframe, a hand wheel controlled the parking brake.

A variation that does not appear to have been distinguished by different coding is the fitting of extended hopper chutes to various 'Dogfish' allocated to the Southern Region. These allowed ballast to be discharged beyond the third rail.

During their working careers, 'Dogfish' were worked quite often with other types of hopper wagons. A train of about 8 'Dogfish' and 4 'Sealion' bogie ballast hopper wagons was a common sight for a lot of PW jobs. On the Southern Region, some 'Dogfish' were worked with 14 ton 'Mermaid' side-tipper ballast wagons, and lettered 'MER-DOG'.

Changes of livery were quite varied. Originally they were all over Black, then 'Gulf Red' from 1960 to 1962. Olive green was used from about 1966 although some in red were still running in 1970. In 1983 a colour scheme of grey was chosen.

By 1999 there were still 762 listed on TOPS but, by 2001 the numbers in stock had dropped to 444 although over 300 were non-operational. Ballasting work would have taken it across much of the BR network but it is uncertain when B 983194's number was changed to DB 983194 nor when it was withdrawn from operational service.

At some stage it was purchased by the Severn Valley Railway and used by them for some years being seen loaded ready for duty in 2011 and 2012. In March 2017, the SVR purchased six "Seacow" bogie ballast wagons making DB983194 superfluous.

After it's arrival at Swanage, DB983194 has been used regularly in ballasting the line.

Information compiled by Peter Sykes 25th October 2021 and updated 7th July 2022