

BR “DOGFISH” 24T BALLAST HOPPER DB 992827

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. Eventually ten lots were issued, over a period of 5 years, covering the construction of 1,249 wagons. The first 7 batches were split between Metro-Cammell and Charles Roberts & Co. and the final three lots were built at BR Shildon.

Charles Roberts were to build the first batch of 148 wagons (B992711 – B992858) under Lot number 2819 to design diagram 1/587. They started releasing them to traffic in October and finished the batch in December 1956. This batch was one of ten and, in total, 1,249 'Dogfish' wagons were produced over a period of 5 years. The 24 Ton 'Dogfish' (and 19 Ton 'Catfish') were BR's standard small ballast hopper wagons becoming the most numerous of small ballast hopper designs in the engineers' fleet.

It is believed that B 992827 was outshopped at the end of November being first allocated to BR's Eastern Region. 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. As a result of this, the end control platform featured three hand wheels and, at the other end of the underframe, a hand wheel controlled the parking brake.

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'.

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. Some of the surviving 'Dogfish' wagons were fitted with air-brakes, around 2000, but despite this modernisation the last examples were withdrawn as early as 2006.

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 the numbers in stock had dropped to 444, by 2001, although over 300 of them were non-operational. Ballasting work would have taken it across much of the BR network but it is uncertain when B 992827 was amended to DB 992827 nor when it was withdrawn from service. The April 1994 edition of

Engineers Series Wagon Fleet (970000 – 999900) published by SCT Publishing showed it still active.

After BR had finished with it's services DB992827 seems to have been an internal user wagon at Whatley Quarry in Somerset. It still carries the final BR Engineers Sector livery of Grey with Yellow band around the top of the bodywork and was seen on one of their sidings on 17th January 2015.

DB 992784 is owned by the Mendip Traction and Rolling Stock Group and believed to have arrived on loan, around 20th October 2016, for a period of time.

Since then DB 992784 has been used regularly on various ballasting jobs along the line.

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