

BR “DOGFISH” 24T BALLAST HOPPER DB 992784

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.

Ten lots were eventually issued covering the construction of 1,249 wagons, over a period of 5 years, the first 7 batches being split between Metro-Cammell and Charles Roberts & Co. The final three lots were built at BR Shildon. The 'Dogfish' (and smaller 19 ton 'Catfish') became BR's standard small ballast hopper wagons and the most numerous of ballast hopper designs in the engineers' fleet.

Charles Roberts built the first batch of 148 wagons (992711 – 992858) under Lot number 2819 to design diagram 1/587. They started releasing them to traffic in October and finished the batch in December 1956. It is believed that B 992784 was outshopped at the end of October or beginning of November.

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of the surviving 'Dogfish' wagons were fitted with air-brakes but, despite this modernisation, the last examples were withdrawn as early as 2006.

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. So far as can be ascertained B 992784 was never thus adapted.

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 992784 was amended to DB 992784 nor when it was withdrawn from service.

After its arrival at Swanage, during October 1990, DB 992784 has been used regularly in ballasting the line.

Information compiled by Peter Sykes 22nd June 2022 and updated 7th July 2022