

BR 34T BALLAST/SLEEPER WAGON DB 978059

British Railways (BR) ordered 1,100 wagons in Lot No. 3343 (numbered B 923300 – B 924399) to design diagram 1/479. They were built at Ashford Carriage & Wagon Works during 1961. These wagons were designated 'Bogie Bolster E' and considered as replacements for 4 wheel Double Bolster wagons. This particular wagon was numbered B 923540.

The above batch had a length of 32 ft over headstocks, and almost 35½ ft over buffers, which was only 5 ft longer than the 4 wheeled wagons they replaced. Bogie Bolster E vehicles rode on vacuum braked modern-design cast steel bogies placed at 22 ft 6 ins centres. They were equipped with Oleo hydraulic buffers, four bolsters and side stanchions plus Instanter couplings and short hand brake levers. Under TOPS they received the coding YCV.

Bolster wagons were flat or low-sided wagon fitted with one or more heavy wooden baulks (bolsters), usually mounted transversely on its deck to support the load it carries. Generally each wooden baulks had a vertical post or rod at each end to prevent the load sliding sideways off the wagon during movements.

Despite their large numbers (total of 1,200) they were found to be too short for many potential loads and so were relatively lightly used over their first 20 years of service. Rather than scrapping all the Bogie Bolster E wagons BR decided to use most of them to replace much older, and smaller, ballast wagons.

Bolsters were removed, and new bodies installed on the frames, to create 34 Ton steel drop-sided bogie ballast wagons (3 doors each side). Fixed ends had an angled plate fitted to prevent loads spilling on to the buffers and draw-gear. Livery was Civil Engineers Grey, with the top third of the sides in Yellow although it was not too long before they became damaged and rusty with increasing use of mechanical equipment loading/unloading them. The type was coded YCV and given the Engineers 'fishkind' of "TURBOT".

Pre-Nationalisation Railway Companies had developed a system of codes for use when sending details of engineering train consists from originating location to the destination. A range of fish names were used, as a means of simplifying early telegraph messages, and this basic nomenclature was perpetuated by BR even though more modern messaging systems were used. 'Turbot' was the name chosen for Bogie Ballast/Sleeper Wagons rebuilt from Bogie Bolster wagons.

These conversions occurred over 6 years (1982 - 1988) at BR's wagon works beginning at Shildon. When that works closed in 1984, conversion work was transferred to Swindon for a couple of years. After a short hiatus, Doncaster took over to complete the rest of the conversions. Shildon converted B 923540 in 1982 as part of Lot 4021 to design diagram YC502 receiving it's present number of DB 978059 being the sixtieth wagon completed.

Later, a few received new bodies with externally strengthened fixed sides, replacing the drop sides, and they were much better coping with Engineers' mechanical equipment. DB 978059 was withdrawn from Engineers service after a decade's use and moved to Internal User service, around 1992 being re-numbered 083657.

It was transferred to Tattenham Corner Up sidings, next to the station, for use as part of

BR's (– from 1st April 1994 Railtrack) Civil Engineering Instruction Train and was noted there on Sunday 25th September 1994. In late 1990's it was withdrawn and put up for sale by Railtrack. Many adjacent vehicles had, by this time, become somewhat derelict.

It was purchased from there by the Southern Catering Project Group and stored for a while at Yeovil Junction. Eventually, it arrived at Norden in April 2001 and was thereafter used for many years to carry spoil and other loads along the railway.

More recently, major work has been undertaken with removal of the drop-side doors and replacement with fixed sides as BR did. Swanage Railway's Locomotive, Carriage & Wagon Department staff undertook the work and it was outshopped from Swanage Goods Shed, on Monday 24th April 2017, being coded "SUPER TURBOT". This design allows better use with mechanised loading/unloading using the Swanage Railway's fleet of Road/Railers. It has been well used for the many Permanent Way works undertaken over the past few years.

Information compiled by Peter Sykes 22nd June 2022

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