

BR 34T BALLAST/SLEEPER WAGON DB 978683

British Railways (BR) ordered 1,100 of a slightly altered design to create 30T Bogie Bolster wagons. Lot No. 3343 (numbered B 923300 – B 924399) to design diagram 1/479 was built at Ashford Carriage & Wagon Works during 1961. The wagons were designated Bogie Bolster E and considered as replacements for 4 wheel Double Bolster wagons.

The 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. DB 923628, and the other 1,099 examples, rode on vacuum braked cast steel bogies placed at 22 ft 6 ins centres. They were equipped with four bolsters and side stanchions. 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 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 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 DB 923628 in 1983 as part of Lot 4021 to design diagram YC502 receiving it's present number of DB 978683.

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. It was withdrawn and waited a decision on it's future on sidings at Hoo Junction in Kent.

DB 978683 was purchased by the Southern Catering Project Group in April 2001 and arrived at Norden road/rail terminal in December 2001.

More recently, major work has been undertaken on the drop-side doors with their removal and replacement with fixed sides as BR did. This allows better use with mechanised loading/unloading using the Swanage Railway's fleet of Road/Railers. It is still well used for the various Permanent Way works undertaken over the past few years.

Information compiled by Peter Sykes 23rd October 2021

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