

BR CLASS 117

TRAILER COMPOSITE LAVATORY 59486

On the 16th October 1958 the British Transport Commission (BTC) placed orders for 168 high density vehicles - 57 Driving Motor Brake Seconds, 57 Driving Motor Seconds and 39 Trailer Composites for the Western Region. The Pressed Steel Company was to build 123 of these at their Linwood Plant (near Paisley) under Lot number 30547 under design diagram 601. At the time 108 were for suburban services from Paddington, 15 for the Bristol-Taunton area.

Delivery commenced in November 1959, with the final Pressed Steel set delivered a year later on the 5/11/60. 59486 was outshopped during 1960. The vehicles were of a high-density (suburban) layout, built to drawings supplied by Derby design office based on their Class 116's. They were delivered in unlined Loco Green (the darker shade usually called Brunswick) which was in accordance with standard practice, at the time, that suburban stock was not lined. All had white roof domes and at least the first set had some of the underframe equipment picked out in silver. Writing could often be seen on the buffer beams to the left of the coupling hook, this referred to them being fitted with Western Region (WR) ATC equipment.

Originally they had 'square' (or 'cut') buffers - large circular ones that appeared to have the top and bottom cut off. Later other types could be found such as oval or large round ones. In June 1961 certain SR services to Reading, Basingstoke, Winchester, Southampton and Portsmouth were noted as being worked by Reading based Class 117s.

Inside, the second class seats were covered with maroon moquette and tan head rests. The floor covering was green and the partitions were in light tan coloured 'wood grain' Formica. In 1975 refurbishments, the wall panels remained the same although the seats were re trimmed in trojan moquette with black head rests. Other seat coverings were used over the years, such as a blue check design which was added during refurbishment, and the wall panels became plain with fluorescent lighting fitted. In their final years a horizontal stripe pattern was used in some vehicles

The sets were not gangwayed when new. However there was always through access inside the individual vehicles - the interior partitions having doors - unlike other high-density vehicles.

For the DMBS there was no change in seating capacity when the gangway was added, the DMS would be reduced from 91 to 89 as the six-seater on the back wall was replaced by a two plus two to allow the gangway in between. The TCL would be reduced from 24 first / 50 second to 22 first / 48 second under design diagram 851.

All Class 117 units were delivered to the Western Region and the early years saw the vehicles working suburban services out of Paddington based at Reading and Southall. In 1964 they began to spread out reaching Cardiff and Plymouth in 1968 and Bristol in 1971. In the mid/late 1970s some vehicles appeared on the London Midland Region with some centre cars being allocated to Newton Heath and Cricklewood.

All refurbishments for the Class were done at Swindon Works. Set L430 (51368 + 59520 + 51410) apparently underwent a test refurbishment in April 1975. It was given blue linoleum, cream Formica panels and blue moquette seat coverings, but retained incandescent lamps. It also retained its plain blue livery at that time. The 'production' refurbishment programme got underway in January 1977 with 59486 was outshopped on 5th April 1979 in all over White and Blue stripe livery.

In the late 1980s sets went to Tyseley for Birmingham Cross-City services. The 1990s saw sets reach Bletchley, Haymarket (for the Fife Circle) and Penzance. Some lasted in passenger use until 2000.

Latterly seeing service in Scotland, as part of 3-car set 117310, 59486 was stored for several years before preservation in 2004. 59486 was purchased by Dorset County Council who wished to obtain three 3-car Class 117 sets for a proposed community rail link between Swanage and Wareham. 59486 was joined by two other vehicles from different sets, DMBS 51341 from 117704 and DMS 51398 from L702.

In 2004 the 3-car unit was moved to a private site at Winfrith in Dorset where all nine of the Class 117 vehicles were being stored in readiness for the Swanage Railway's Wareham extension to bear fruit.

However in 2007 the site had to be cleared with 51341, 59486 and 51398 moving to the Midland Railway Centre at Butterley for storage. 59486 only remained in store for 12 months, however, before being extracted for contract restoration. The two power cars [51341 and 51398] were later sold for scrap.

During 2008, 59486 received external repairs and a full repaint into BR Green. Following completion the vehicle was borrowed and made its preservation passenger debut when it ran briefly with the MRC's Class 127 set, giving a taster of what an authentic Class 127 4-car set would look like. The vehicle was then returned to store awaiting collection.

In summer 2010, 59486 was dispatched to the Swanage Railway, intended to join resident set 51346 and 51388. However the two power cars had recently been withdrawn from service requiring overhaul, so 59486 was also stored despite being in good condition. A four year period of inactivity then followed.

In September 2014, 59486 was removed from store and sent to Eastleigh Works for a further overhaul and mainline registration. The overhaul work, particularly the mainline specifications, took far longer than originally hoped for or planned. The vehicles involved in the project were the subject of several setbacks concerning the mechanical components such as wheel sets. Combined, these issues led to 59486 being inside Eastleigh works for several years. A modern Central Door Lock system was installed to comply with current main line requirements.

In September 2016 the vehicle had progressed to the stage where bodywork and painting was required. Moved into the excellent paint shop facility at Eastleigh, 59486 was transformed rapidly, emerging in the following month sporting a fresh coat of BR Green. By late 2017, 59486 was receiving mechanical overhaul work to the bogies.

It was to be February 2020 before the hugely expensive and delayed overhaul to mainline standard was completed. 59486 finally returned to the Swanage Railway where it was stored operational to await the completion of paperwork to allow it to operate on Network Rail. The Covid-19 pandemic further delayed the entry into passenger service,

however during the summer of 2021 the 3-car set finally started running driver training trips along the line, with the long awaited relaunch into passenger following in August at the railway's "Rail to Roads" event. It had been 13 years since 59486 had carried passengers.

During 2021, 59486 operated off-peak services along the Swanage Railway in a 3-car set with 51388 and 51356. The railway's services were severely impacted by COVID-19,

In due course, it formed part of the DMU fleet used to run stage 2 trial services to and from Wareham mainline station in 2023. These were, once again, operated under the West Coast Railway Company's Safety Case and Train Operating Company licence using their Drivers and Guards. The Swanage Railway used specially trained staff to 'conduct' WCRC crews as well as drive/guard the trains between Swanage and Norden.

Information compiled by Peter Sykes 19th February 2024