

## BR CLASS 117 DRIVING MOTOR SECOND No. 51392

British Railways (BR) Class 117 Pressed Steel 3-car Diesel Mechanical Units (DMUs) were one of the Western Region high density designs coming from the drawing office in Derby based on the earlier Class 116. Power cars in the first three Class 117 sets and the DMBS from the fourth set (51332/3/4/5 and 51374/5/6) had a curved top to the cab roof, but all the others had a much more subtle and flatter looking top.

Pressed Steel (Linwood) was founded in 1926 and is probably better known for producing body panels for cars. It took over the Beardmore Factory at Linwood (outside Paisley in Scotland) where it produced railway vehicles during BR's modernisation period. The DMUs were: 123 vehicles of Class 117 and 26 Class 121 vehicles.

Driving Motor Second (DMS) 51392 formed part of Lot Number: 30548 under Diagram No. 535. It was new in June 1960 and went straight into service based at Southall Depot (81C). Originally the class worked predominately on local routes out of London Paddington. During April 1968 Southall lost its entire DMU allocation with units transferred to Reading Depot (81D).

Most 117s were delivered without marker lights, giving the front a rather plain appearance particularly when the yellow end was added with rail blue livery. Marker lights were added in the late 1970s / early 1980s.

Drivers cab handrails started out as having the dual purpose of being hollow and also acting as the drain pipe for gutters. These were always blocking, however, so they were removed and replaced with normal handrails. Originally they had squared 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.

Western Region Automatic Train Control (ATC) warning system was fitted from new but, around early May 1972, 51392 was dual fitted with BR's standard Automatic Warning System (AWS). Later, during June 1975, the WR ATC equipment was removed.

The 117 power train was pretty standard using Leyland 680 horizontal 150 hp engines coupled to R14 gearboxes and F239 final drives. The engine exhausts started out as being the Derby type joining together in a box at roof level. There were later changed to the standard individual style.

Inside, the second class seats began with maroon uncut moquette with tan coloured headrests. The floor covering was green linoleum style with partitions in light tan coloured 'wood grain' Formica panelling. Drivers cab seats were covered in a green uncut moquette.

Class 117 sets were not gangwayed between vehicles when new. However there was always through access inside each individual vehicle - the interior partitions having doors - unlike some other high-density designs. Gangways were added at a later date and the first to be treated was around June 1965. The gangways were of the 'suspended' type used for many years on GWR stock.

The remainder of Class 117 vehicles would begin to have gangways added as they were needed for 'Paytrain' operations. All had been treated by the end of 1973. This class operated mainly around the Paddington/Reading areas. 42 of each power car type were built with 39 centre cars.

In early 1977, 51392 was withdrawn from service for thorough refurbishment. All refurbishments for Class 117s were done at Swindon Works with interiors having blue linoleum on the floors, cream Formica covered wall panels and uncut blue moquette seat coverings. In the main they retained the BR plain blue livery but 51392 was outshopped from Swindon Works on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1977 painted in white with a blue stripe livery. It carried on working from Reading Depot for around 24 years before it's next move.

This time it was transferred from Western Region to Midland Region becoming based at Bletchley Depot from August 1992. Latterly 51392 saw service around north London and the adjacent Home Counties as part of 2-car set 117701 coupled to DMBS number 51350.

On 26th January 1999, set 117701 was noted near Walthamstow Queens Road station heading towards Barking with vehicle 51392 leading 51350. In fact on many occasions the set was noted operating on Gospel Oak – Barking services during 1998 and 1999. During this period it carried Network South East livery (and still does!).

It's stay at Bletchley was 'only' 7 years as 51392 was withdrawn in September 1999 and then stayed in outdoor storage for around 15 years. Class 117s were the last of the first generation types to stay in revenue earning service.

51392 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. 51392 was joined by two other vehicles from different sets, TCL 59492 from 117313 and DMBS 51356 from set 117702.

In 2004 the 3-car unit was moved to a private site in Dorset where all nine 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 one set relocating to the Weardale Railway and the other two stored at the Midland Railway Centre in Butterley, all for storage. 51356, 59492 and 51392 was the set moved to the former location in March 2007.

51392 remained in store with no work being undertaken on the vehicle so, after many years out of use, the vehicle had suffered noticeable deterioration. In November 2009, the whole set was moved to Allelys Heavy Haulage yard in Warwickshire, for continued storage.

By 2011 it was understood that Dorset County Council would no longer be proceeding with the plan to operate their nine Class 117 vehicles, with six other vehicles being sold. However, 51392 was not disposed and remained in store.

In December 2014, 51392 was moved from Allelys to the Swanage Railway for spares recovery before moving to Arlington Railway Services at Eastleigh works in February 2015 for the same purpose. Here it assisted with the mainline registration of DMS 51388.

It wasn't expected that 51392 would return from Eastleigh, however upon the completion of the project to restore a 3-car set to mainline standards in 2020, 51392 was tripped back to Swanage, along with the considerably better looking overhauled set, in February.

51392 is currently stored at the Swanage Railway where it continues to be used as a source of spare parts. It is expected that 51392 will continue to provide parts before being disposed of.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

<https://www.railcar.co.uk/data/vehicle/51392>

<https://preserved.railcar.co.uk/51392.html>

<https://railcar.co.uk/type/class-117/summary>

Information compiled by Peter Sykes 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024