

BR MKI OPEN FIRST No. 3090

Open First (FO) coach numbered 3090 was built by Birmingham Railway Carriage & Wagon Co. in Lot No. 30472. This batch of 10 similar vehicles (numbered 3085 to 3094) was ordered by BR on 14th May 1957 with the last vehicle (3094) delivered on 8th August 1959. It is likely that 3090 would have been outshopped a month or so earlier.

BR standard MkI underframe design was used supported on two vacuum braked BRI bogies. BR Design Diagram 73 shows the installation of two toilets, one at each end, with the open passenger saloon fitted with 42 seats in a 2 + 1 layout. Steam heating radiators were installed under each seat and the coach weighed

3090 was allocated initially to BR's Western Region and, no doubt, would have been used widely on West of England and other prestige services. The deeply cushioned seating, covered in uncut moquette, was [and remains] very comfortable. During an overhaul by BR, 3090 had its BRI bogies replaced with two B4 design bogies and modern air braking equipment. This meant an even more comfortable high speed ride and compatibility with newer air braked only locomotives.

After withdrawal at Radyr yard in south Wales, it was marked as condemned (due to sustaining substantial accident damage to one corner) to be sent to a scrap merchant for destruction. It was purchased by the Southern Steam Trust in 1989 and moved to a site in Essex but vandalism and theft of all the braking equipment meant it was transported to Swanage for a period but vandalism and deterioration continued.

Eventually 3090 was kindly accommodated at a site within the former CEGB Power Station at Littlebrook near Dartford, Kent. The rented area allowed volunteers to commence refurbishment work in 100% security. For the next 5 years working parties had to replace the damaged body structure, with a bespoke new steel corner, to ensure the coach regained its original strength.

In addition, the vacuum braking system equipment had to be sourced and installed, all the broken window panes replaced, the interior thoroughly refurbished including a full re-wire. The coach's serious corrosion issues, which had arisen over many years, were also dealt with, before 3090 could be moved to Swanage on Friday 5th May 2000.

It entered service in the "Wessex Belle" rake during March 2004. Subsequently it has been thoroughly refurbished and repainted, during 2011/12, into BR's early 1950s carmine/cream ("blood & custard") livery which it still carries as one of two "Wessex Belle" Dining Cars.

Dorset Police's rural crime team investigated an incident which happened at some point between the late hours of Friday 24th February and the early hours of Saturday 25th February 2023. Vandals smashed windows and attempted to set light to one of the 'Wessex Belle' dining train carriages.

During the attack several windows were broken and vandals gained entry. Paraffin was poured and a rag set alight in an attempt to set the carriage on fire. If anyone has any information that could help Dorset Police in relation to this incident they are asked to report it by telephoning 101 and quoting the incident number 55230030725.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Swanage Railway Stock Books

Preserved Coaching Stock of British Railways – Part One BR Design Stock

by Peter Hall and Peter Fox (Platform 5 Publishing – 1994)

The Railway Heritage Register Carriage Survey Project:

<http://www.cs.rhrp.org.uk/se/CarriageInfo.asp?Ref=1220>

Information collated by Peter Sykes 17th March 2024