

BR MKIIIa CONVERTIBLE SLEEPING CAR No. 10619

Convertible Sleeping Car with Pantry (SLEP) No 10619 is the Swanage Railway's newest coach but it is not in passenger service as it was purchased for volunteer accommodation.

10619 was built at BR's Derby Carriage & Wagon Works as part of Lot No. 30960 (numbered 10500 to 10619) on 8th August 1979. It was the last vehicle of the batch of 120 SLEP's constructed being outshopped on 10th September 1983. It is of modern monocoque construction (i.e. the body is load bearing and doesn't need an underframe). In line with most InterCity coaching stock, at that time, the MkIII coach is 75 feet long

Design diagram 7 showed the vehicle having 13 compartments with the 13th being used as an attendant's pantry at one end. Each passenger compartment is composed of a fixed lower berth and a hinged upper berth. Originally, it was fitted with modern BT10 bogies introduced in the 1970's for use under InterCity 125 (HST) vehicles. It had a dual suspension arrangement of coil springs supplemented by a secondary airbag located on the pivot plank.

The decision to scrap all earlier pre-Grouping and BR Mk I sleeping cars to be replaced with modern MkIII took some time. BR was unsure whether to upgrade these 'old' sleepers, build new ones or, even, withdraw from sleeping car trains entirely. However, BR management had their minds made up for them following a disastrous fire. This occurred on a service in the Taunton area during the evening of Thursday 6th July 1978.

After investigation it was found that the fire was caused by an electric heater that had been obstructed by sacks of dirty bed linen in the leading vestibule, causing it to overheat. 12 passengers died, with most being due to smoke inhalation, and another 15 were injured. As a direct result, BR designed a modern replacement for these ageing sleeping cars.

In service the replacement vehicles were air conditioned with each compartment having adjustable thermostats as well as smoke detectors. Unfortunately, the market for sleeper services had already started to decline with the introduction of faster day-time trains.

As a result, any MkIII sleeper vehicles damaged in accidents were just scrapped and not replaced. Between 1988 and 1998, ten SLE [i.e. No Pantry] sleepers were leased to Danish State Railways (DSB) for use across Denmark. This lease came to an end following the opening of the Great Belt Fixed Link combined bridge and tunnel.

In the early 1990's, nine cars were sent for safe storage to the Motor Transport Sidings at the Ministry of Defence Arcott Hill site near Bicester. Their BT10 bogies were recovered by BR, for use on other MkIII vehicles, and replaced by

accommodation bogies which is where 10619 received it's current Commonwealth style bogies.

10619 was purchased in 1994 and moved to Swanage. It resides on an isolated section of track near the engine shed. All lighting and heating has now been changed to work on a 240v mains supply. It is also connected to the local mains water and sewerage services. It is much appreciated by volunteers working on the Swanage Railway.

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=2867>

Information collated by Peter Sykes 17th March 2024