

LNER 40T RAIL/SLEEPER WAGON 'DOLPHIN' DE 274571

The London & North Eastern Railway (LNER) appears to have been the first railway company to introduce a multi-purpose engineers wagon capable of carrying 60ft. rails, ballast and sleepers. They were 65 ft 7 in over headstocks with 5 ft 6 in wheelbase diamond framed bogies at 46 ft centres having LNER design open front axle boxes.

Headstocks were mounted above floor height and were topped with reinforced steel ends providing an interior length of 63 ft 5 in. All Dolphins were built without vacuum brakes and there is no evidence of any being retrofitted with continuous brakes or through pipes.

Originally the three-planked sides were in three hinged sections. There were 15 'door bangers' fixed to the frame to ensure the wooden sections did not damage axle boxes and the like when they were lowered (dropped !). Livery was nominally Grey but it soon was rubbed off leaving weathered wood and white lettering.

DE 274571 was built by the wagon firm of Head Wrightson Ltd., Thornaby-on-Tees, North Yorkshire to LNER design diagram 99. BR had ordered 90 wagons in Lot No. 2817 and it is believed DE 274571 was outshopped during 1945. The 40 Tons carrying capacity, combined with small wheeled bogies and low floors, made these vehicles very useful at worksites. The internal load-carrying length of 63 ft 5 ins allowed it to carry up to five 60 ft wooden sleepered bullhead track panels.

The under framing had several styles and BR's Civil Engineers Department decided to convert vehicles with ends partly or completely cut down, all wooden sides removed etc. In this stripped state they gave many decades of use, mainly carrying track panels, and some lasted until around the late-1980's.

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. 'Dolphin' was the name chosen for low-sided bogie Rail/Sleeper wagons.

After withdrawal it was purchased by the Mid Hants Railway (MHR) and used by them for some time on numerous Permanent Way duties. The Southern Steam Trust (now Swanage Railway Trust) purchased DE 274571 from the MHR during 1992.

This wagon was ideal in assisting the task of continued track laying beyond Norden towards Furzebrook. It was occupied undertaking this work for many years but now resides in sidings, as a rule, awaiting it's next duties.

The wagon has had a hard life, for almost 80 years with various Permanent Way Departments, and is now called into use only on rare occasions.

Information compiled by Peter Sykes 21st June 2022

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