

45129 bogie snowplough conversion

During 1984/85 a plan was devised to mount Beilhack snow plough blades on bogies from withdrawn Class 40s, a total of six snowploughs, ADB965576-581, being built at Stratford. The plough blade was mounted on the former inner end of the bogie while other alterations saw the pony wheels removed and a conventional air brake system installed. To provide additional weight, a ballast box was constructed on top of the bogie frame.

During 1988, it was decided to construct four additional Beilhack snowploughs and as there were no more Class 40 bogies available, attention turned to using Class 45 bogies from the withdrawn locos stored in March Yard. An inspection took place of all the locos there and unfortunately for 45009 and 45129, they were deemed to be sitting on the bogies most suitable for conversion.



Withdrawn 45129 stored in the yard at March on 30th January 1988.

Both locos were moved (along with 20149/167/216) as 9Z29 23:20 Whitemoor – Humberstone Road, Leicester on 8th August 1988 and tripped the short distance into Vic Berrys scrapyard the following day. The Class 45s were noted as still intact on 13th August, but by 27th they had been cut up, with the bogies removed and sent to Ashford Crane Repair Depot for conversion. The conversions were completed during 1989 and given the numbers ADB966096-099. Like the ex Class 40 ploughs, they were finished in all over yellow, but with the application of Network SouthEast lettering atop the ballast box, as the sector had paid for the conversion work.

During BR days, the four Class 45 ploughs were based in the south of England, with ADB966096/097 based at Eastleigh and ADB966098/099 at Ashford.



ADB966098 at Ashford - Photo by Paul Wade

A newly converted and pristine ADB966098 sits in the autumn sunshine at Ashford Crane Repair Depot on 16th October 1989. Like the other former Class 45 ploughs, it received Network SouthEast lettering on top of the ballast box.

With the break-up of British Rail in 1994, ownership of the Beilhack ploughs passed to Railtrack. During the second half of the decade, the low height of the ploughs made them favourites for working under the overhead electrification of the West Coast and East Coast routes, with stabling locations including Doncaster, Peterborough, Crewe and Motherwell. With the exception of Peterborough, these locations are still used today.



ADB966099 at Peterborough - Photo by Gareth Bayer

When seen at Peterborough on 10th December 1997, ex Class 45 plough ADB966099 looked the worse for wear, with faded paintwork, rusty bodywork and removed NSE lettering.

Much needed overhauls were carried out at the start of the 2000s, the snowploughs by now being extremely faded in their yellow livery. As well as repairs to body corrosion, the Beilhacks received a smart new black livery with the blade remaining in yellow, while Railtrack logos and 'Heart of the railway' slogans were applied.



ADB966098 at Peterborough - Photo by Gareth Bayer

A Railtrack liveried former 'Peak' bogie, is seen at Peterborough on 24th October 2003. The substantial bracing behind the plough blade can be seen.

Under Network Rail ownership, the Beilhacks were given another refurbishment around 2011 at Brodie Rail, Kilmarnock. A fresh coat of black was also applied, this including the application of full Network Rail logos. Two of the Class 45 bogie Beilhacks did not survive this refurbishment though, ADB966096 and ADB966097 being scrapped on site at Kilmarnock. Unfortunately it is very hard to determine which ploughs came from which loco, so the surviving pair could be from 45009, 45129 or one bogie from each!

Today, the eight remaining Beilhacks still form a key part of Network Rail's snow clearing equipment, working alongside the larger independent snowploughs. The prolonged bad weather of late February and early March 2018 saw the Beilhacks widely deployed.



ADB966099 at York Dringhouses - Photo by Phil Precious

On 1st March 2018 DRS 66434 and 66422 pass York Dringhouses with the 1Z99 Doncaster West Yard-Berwick in an effort to keep the East Coast Main Line open in Northumberland. The ploughs are the sole remaining ex 'Peak' pair, ADB966098 and ADB966099.

Steve Dexter