

Trans-Pennine Twilight

Some of my best memories of 'Peak' operation are of the days spent on the North Trans-Pennine route, when 45/1s reigned supreme on North Wales/Liverpool to Scarborough and Newcastle trains. These services were the last major passenger stronghold of the class, where you could guarantee 'Peak' haulage. The diagrams were intensive and the geographical nature of the route meant the locos were worked hard over long distances such as Holyhead to Newcastle. It was very satisfying to see the ageing giants, many well overdue for overhaul, holding their own, working to full capacity on important passenger trains. I can picture Manchester Victoria now, reverberating to sounds of humming radiator fans, shrilling compressors and the rattling of broken engine room grilles!

In March 1987, two loco-hauled diagrams were taken over by Class 150/2 'Sprinters' prior to their widespread introduction with the new May timetable and many predicted that with fewer loco-hauled diagrams, most would be covered by 47/4s. However, this proved not to be the case, with the 'Peaks' becoming even more plentiful and virtually dominating the route for the last month of the old timetable. With this in mind, and only three weeks to go to the end of 'Peak' diagrams, my Father and I decided to travel to Manchester on Easter Saturday, April 18th 1987, to take photographs and obtain haulage.

After alighting from the Piccadilly-Victoria shuttle bus, we stepped on to Victoria's Platform 11 just as 45124 was arriving with the 07.10 Newcastle - Liverpool, smack on time at 10.27. On this day '124 was sporting a freshly repainted No. 1 end bodyside indicating that she may have had recent minor fire damage. However, she seemed in fine fettle now as she stormed out of the station following a crew change and the usual loading of mail.

We then crossed under the subway to Platform 12 to await the arrival of the 10.03 Liverpool-Scarborough. If this was a 'Peak' we were going to catch it to Stalybridge and return to Victoria on the 08.20 Newcastle-Llandudno. The Manchester to Stalybridge run was always good for 'bashing' as there was only a nine-minute gap between eastbound and westbound trains at Stalybridge and a 21 minute gap at Manchester Victoria. Also, provided you did not leave the station at either end, you did not get your ticket checked so you only had to pay for one trip! From Platform 12, I could spot 45 007 on the stabling point beneath the bridge in front of Victoria East signal box, and I was just contemplating a photo when 45115 rolled in with the 10.03 from Liverpool. We climbed aboard and after a minute or so and a quick toot on the horn, '115 accelerated hard out of the station to tackle the 1 in 47 climb to Miles Platting. She seemed almost to be having a race with a Class 504 unit, which was also leaving on a service to Bury, but we soon parted company as the orange and brown unit veered off to the right leaving '115 to continue her climb.

Arrival at Stalybridge was on time and I watched as 45115 departed, making a fine site heading for the hills with a complete seven-coach rake of Trans-Pennine liveried Mk.2 coaches. As I peered towards Stalybridge Tunnel, the sight of three lights in a horizontal line, piercing through the darkness, confirmed that the Llandudno train was 'Peak' hauled. Sure enough, as we joined the fair number of passengers waiting to board the train, 45125 (complete with Tinsley depot snail above the number) drew to a stand alongside the Stalybridge-Stockport DMU formed of a Class 101 unit. We were soon on our way and as we eased through the 20mph Miles Platting Junction (with much squealing of wheels) '125 gave a toot of the horn to some photographers at the side of the line opposite the signal box, before descending into Victoria's No.11 platform, at that time still the longest in the world (albeit with only half in passenger use).

45125 pulled out, and we retraced our steps through the subway to Platform 13 where details of the next eastbound service, the 08.17 Holyhead-Newcastle, were displayed on the TV screens. A smoky 31412 (with grey roof) was sitting in the centre road opposite Platform 12, awaiting its next banking duty, but passengers in the vicinity did not look appreciative of the fumes which were collecting under the platform canopy!

The Newcastle train arrived with 45111 at the head which looked and sounded to be in good form, despite being slated for early withdrawal due to lack of works attention. Only scars were evident where she once proudly displayed 'Grenadier Guardsman' nameplates (she

was in fact the last 'Peak' to carry official nameplates until they were removed by Toton depot in the autumn of 1986) but this did not deter her making another spirited exit from the station, in true 'Peak' style. No sooner had we passed 45 007 on the stabling point, than we passed sister 45145 (with buffer beams painted partially red) descending the bank with a train of newspaper vans for Red Bank sidings.

We alighted at Stalybridge and as '111' headed for the hills we had lunch in the famous buffet bar, as we knew the next westbound service, the 09.53 Scarborough- Holyhead, would be a 'Sprinter'. The next eastbound service was the 12.03 Liverpool to Scarborough which was always a very reliable 'Peak' turn (in fact in all my visits to the Trans-Pennine I never knew a 47 turn up on it). Sure enough, 45103 drew into the platform with a mixture of blue/grey and Trans-Pennine Mk.2s and we boarded the front coach for a trip to Huddersfield.

Full power was usually applied soon after departing Stalybridge and 45103 did not disappoint as we stormed past 37102 on the station avoiding line waiting to follow us with ten 100 ton tank wagons. As we emerged from Stalybridge Tunnel, the Pennines opened out before us and we could clearly hear the rasp of '103's exhaust as she attacked the seven-mile 1 in 105 climb to Standedge Tunnel. We were soon passing through Scout Tunnel and past the rows of stone terraced houses near Mossley station. Just before we reached Greenfield Junction signal box and station, we passed another 'Sprinter' going west forming the 10.53 Scarborough-Holyhead. Before the 'Sprinters' took over, this was also a reliable 'Peak' turn, despite being diagrammed for a 47! After crossing the impressive Saddleworth Viaduct we began the final part of the climb round the sweeping curves to Diggle Junction signal box before plunging into the 3 miles 64 yards Standedge Tunnel. Inside the tunnel is level and we heard '103's whining radiator fan as the coach lights flashed along the tunnel walls.

A brake application was made as we approached the end of the tunnel to reduce speed for the tight curves approaching Marsden station. These negotiated, we began the long sweeping descent (again at 1 in 105) towards Huddersfield, passing the old cotton mills of Linthwaite and Slaithwaite, before passing the site of the once extensive yard at Gledholt and diving into the short Gledholt tunnel. Sunshine was glimpsed again briefly as we passed the junction with the line to Sheffield at Springwood, before entering Huddersfield Tunnel, in which the stencil indicator showed we were heading for Platform 8.

Following the boarding and alighting of passengers, 45103 eased quietly out of the station, on time at 13.26, passing the resident station pilot in the form of 08305 sitting in the bay on the south side of the station. As the Scarborough train's tail lamp disappeared from sight in the distance and 37102 growled through the station with its tank train, we contemplated our next move. The next westbound service, the 11.24 Newcastle-Liverpool was diagrammed for a 47/4 and sure enough, it arrived with 47421 'The Brontes of Haworth' in charge, so we decided to wait for an hour for the 12.53 Scarborough- Holyhead, which should have a 45/1 on the front, and return to Stalybridge. In the meantime I was treated to the sight of a very clean and healthy sounding 45113 arriving and departing with the 10.44 Holyhead - Newcastle.

Peering into the distance at 14.48, I was pleased to see the bulbous yellow nose of a 'Peak' appear round the curve from Deighton and we prepared to board the front coach as the 12.53 from Scarborough crossed Huddersfield Viaduct, threaded its way through the station point work, and rumbled to a halt at Platform 1 in the capable hands of Derby-built veteran 45121.

Departure eastbound was also usually spirited, in preparation for the climb to Marsden, and with head out of the front coach, the sound and smell of a '45' opening up inside Huddersfield tunnel was quite an experience! 45121 was no exception, and I enjoyed the rush of warm Sulzer fumes on my face and the vibration of thumping pistons echoing off the tunnel walls.

Soon we were attacking the eastern slopes of the Pennines with vigour and squealing round the 'S' bend at Marsden, before heading through Standedge Tunnel and descending back down to Stalybridge (passing a 'Sprinter' on the 14.03 Liverpool- Scarborough at Greenfield).

Motive power for the 13.00 Bangor-York service was, as expected, in the form of its booked 47/4 No. 47533, so we waited at Stalybridge for the return of 45115 on the 13.53 Scarborough-Liverpool, which we caught back to Manchester Victoria.

45 007 had in the meantime been joined on the stabling point by 45142 and I was just thinking how well things were going when I saw on the screen that 45124 on the 16.03 Liverpool-Newcastle was running ten minutes late. This would mean that we would risk missing the return westbound service at Stalybridge, the 14.19 Newcastle-Liverpool, which should have a fresh 'Peak' on it. However, we decided to chance it, especially when 45124 arrived only eight minutes late. Another powerful ascent of Miles Platting bank later, and a sprint through the subway at Stalybridge, just enabled a good photo of 45130 arriving on the Liverpool train as 45124 pulled out - phew!

For another locomotive promised early withdrawal, 45130 seemed to be in fine form, making light work of the trip to Manchester and she certainly showed no signs of being two years overdue for works attention as she hammered out of Victoria.

Then it was back under the subway again for one final 'bash' to Huddersfield behind 45125 on the 15.16 Llandudno- York, before heading home via the 16.17 Newcastle-Liverpool, (hopefully with yet another different 45) and the Stalybridge- Stockport DMU.

Another oil tank train was waiting for a path over the Pennines at Stalybridge and our secondman exchanged a friendly wave with 47364's driver as 45125 piled on the power accelerating out of the station. As we pounded the Pennine metals once again we met 45103 between Mossley and Greenfield heading westbound with the 15.53 Scarborough - Liverpool. Hearing 45125 thundering away at the front of the train, the thought that in only three weeks she would be written off as 'surplus to requirements', seemed incomprehensible. Thankfully though she was saved and is currently enjoying preservation at the Great Central Railway, Loughborough.

At Huddersfield I said farewell to 45125 as she sent a long plume of exhaust straight up into the air and continued her journey to York with, no doubt, a wide variety of passengers, ranging from students and businessmen to enthusiasts and holidaymakers.

The 16.17 Newcastle-Liverpool arrived with 47540 in charge (the only 47 to turn up on a 'Peak' diagram), which was a bit of a disappointment, but as I settled back into the comfortable surroundings of a Mk.2 coach and watched the Pennines roll by, it was time to reflect on a truly memorable day for 'Peak' haulage. Seeing eight 45/1s in top link use at a time when the fleet had already been depleted by 14 withdrawals and would see another 15 condemnations over the following three weeks (including 45 111/125/130 and our own 133), was incredible. It just went to show how the fleet was in a generally very good condition and could have continued in front line service for much longer. Certainly the withdrawal of 45 114/118 and 122 only a year from light overhaul was sheer economic madness.

As it turned out, 45/1s made appearances on the remaining loco-hauled Trans-Pennine service long after the start of the Summer 1987 timetable and as late as June 1988.

It was to be 10 years before I could enjoy a Peak over the Pennines again, in the shape of D172 'Ixion' working the 'Napier & Sulzer Pioneer' railtour on 5th July 1997. The question is, will a Peak make it back on to the main line in the future to make it all possible again?

Steve Dexter, August 2015